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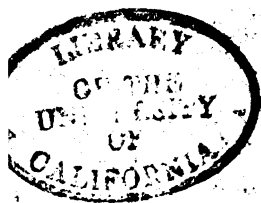
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GODFREY HELSTONE

VOL. I.

GODFREY HELSTONE

A Novel

BY

GEORGIANA M. CRAIK

AUTHOR OF "TWO WOMEN," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

THERE is a grace about some women that gives harmony to their slightest movements, and sweetness to their most trivial acts, so that if they but speak to you, you are conscious of a charm in the accent and cadence of their words, if they only so much as cross a floor your eye follows them with the same sort of pleasure with which your ear listens to music ; but Margaret Egerton was not one of these happily gifted people. She was young, yet she had not much of

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the bloom of youth ; her features were delicate, and yet, except at rare moments, few people called her pretty ; she was straightly made, with a figure that was light and slim, yet in its action there was always a certain stiffness, and the awkwardness that came from self-consciousness and self-depreciation. She was a woman to whom a little admiration from the people whom she loved would have given warmth and life ; but she did not arouse admiration easily, and perhaps the person in the world who cared for her most, was the one who was most keenly alive to her deficiencies and to her inability to charm.

She was standing at a table in her cousin Godfrey Helstone's drawing-room arranging some flowers in a bowl, and, to tell the truth, arranging them ill enough, for she had not the knack of doing that sort of

thing gracefully. She had been trying to do it just now with much labour, but Godfrey, glancing up once or twice from his book, had experienced a mixture of amazement and irritation at her want of success. He had seen other women set a cluster of flowers with a few careless touches, so that when he looked at them he felt in a moment that the thing could not be better done; but poor Margaret had been toiling over *her* work for ten minutes, and the result at last was only a tasteless mass of close-packed roses.

“Don’t you think you might put some more greenery there?” he said to her suddenly.

The girl glanced up when her cousin spoke. Perhaps—for, as I have said, she was self-conscious—she had already had a suspicion that Godfrey, although he seemed

to be reading, was sufficiently aware of her occupation to be capable of criticizing it, and the suspicion had possibly helped to make her ungraceful fingers even less deft than usual at their work. At any rate, as she looked up now there was something deprecating in her expression.

“Some more greenery?” she echoed hesitatingly. “Well, I can try; only I am afraid it might make them look untidy.”

“I wouldn’t mind about that,” he answered.

“I am afraid I am not clever at arranging flowers,” she said gently.

And then he held his peace. That fact was so self-evident that, not being a man who paid compliments, he probably felt silence to be his best response.

She went on labouring with her heavy hand, and he read, and spoke no more. She

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placed her bowl presently in the centre of the table, and went back from it a little to survey the effect. The effect was not good, as even she was aware; but she could do her work no better, so she gave a little sigh, and gathered up the flowers and leaves that she had not used, and went away. And then when she was gone, her cousin for a moment put down his book and looked at the bouquet steadily, and said to himself half-aloud, "How odd!"

They were very good friends, these two, though Margaret had no more charm for Godfrey than if she had been a boy instead of a girl of twenty. Two years ago, when her father died, it was he who had first proposed to his mother that she should come and live with them. "It would be terribly dreary for her to be alone in that big place," he had said. For Margaret was

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the only child of Mrs. Helstone's brother, who had been a rich man, and his wealth had all gone to her, with the great house in which she had grown up, and which, indeed, as Godfrey said, would have been a dull place for her to have continued to live in alone. Ivor Hall, they called it. It stood within a mile of Godfrey's own more modest house — the Dene. It was a ponderous, many-roomed building, with a certain grim picturesqueness about it; it was associated to Margaret with all her memories of the mother who had died when she was a little child, and by whose side she had walked about its formal gardens, and of the silent father who had made her his companion during ten years of a quiet life; yet after she was left alone, when Godfrey said to her, "Come and make your home with us," she had come willingly. She would have

done most things that Godfrey asked her to do. When he said, "Come to us," he brought the colour to her cheek, and one of those rare looks into her face that gave her for a moment a touch of beauty.

Perhaps he did not know what power he had to bring warmth and animation to her. He did not care enough about the matter, I am afraid, to know. She was nothing to him but his cousin Margaret—hardly even a favourite cousin—only a good, unselfish, kind-hearted girl whom he had known all his life, and for whom he had a loyal feeling of placid friendship. That she liked him more than he liked her he could scarcely fail to be aware, but how much more she liked him he probably did not ask himself; the question was one that scarcely interested him enough to arouse speculation concerning it in his mind.

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“Margaret will be a bait to fortune-hunters now,” he had said one day to his mother soon after the girl came to stay with them. “I hope she won’t be tempted to make some foolish marriage.”

He made this remark lightly, as if her marriage were a matter with which he could have no personal concern, and Mrs. Helstone hesitated before she spoke the reply that rose to her lips. But though she hesitated she ended by speaking it.

“Why don’t you try to put such a thing out of her power?” she said.

“Who?—I?” Godfrey ejaculated hastily, and for a moment the colour came into his face; but after this one moment he recovered himself, and laughed an unembarrassed laugh. “I shall never do that,” he said. “I want neither Margaret’s money nor herself.”

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"You might do worse than want her," Mrs. Helstone answered.

"I suppose so," he replied carelessly. "Nevertheless—" and then he turned away. He was rather annoyed at what his mother had said. He was proud enough to have no wish to take a rich woman for his wife, and indifferent enough to Margaret to feel no temptation to woo her. "She is one of the last girls in the world one would fall in love with," he said, perhaps a little contemptuously, to himself.

But yet the young man was always very kind to his cousin, in a quiet, undemonstrative way. When he was at home they often talked and walked and rode together; they never flirted, partly because flirting was not an amusement he was much addicted to with anybody, partly because she, on her side, could not have succeeded in lending

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herself with any grace or felicity to that exercise; but they were intimate after a fashion, and if you had asked him how he liked her he would have spoken of her good qualities warmly and cordially. "She has everything to make her attractive—except attractiveness," he once said laughingly to his mother, and though Mrs. Helstone would fain have denied the assertion, yet she could not. For I have said before that the person who loved her best was the one who was perhaps most keenly alive to her deficiencies, and that person to whom she was most dear, and who would gladly have had her for her daughter in truth, as she was already a daughter in affection, was Mrs. Helstone.

The two women spent a very quiet life together. Mrs. Helstone was a widow, and Godfrey was her only son. He was twenty-

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four, and had just taken his degree at Oxford, and come into the enjoyment of the estate which his father's death had left to him three years before. It was not a large estate, but it was large enough to make him independent. He was something of a student, too, and had a good library, in which he cared to spend a considerable portion of his time. For his age, he was rather a grave man, though social in a fair degree, and fond of travel, and sport, and active life. He was a good son, too, and a good friend, in the opinion, at any rate, of the two women who, in their several relations to him, thought they knew him best.

Like other fond and foolish women these two were in the habit, during Godfrey's long absences from home, of spending much time in talking together over his manifold virtues. To Mrs. Helstone the occupation was

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naturally an attractive one ; and if when her niece came to live with her she yielded to the temptation of trying to infuse some of her own enthusiasm into the heart of the younger woman, the fault was at least comprehensible. In truth, too, Godfrey had some qualities that made him not ill-fitted to occupy the place in her affection to which her aunt encouraged Margaret to elevate him, for he was handsome and brave, and kind and courteous ; he could be tender where tenderness was called for, and hot when anger was needed. The girl admired, and loved, and a little feared him. To talk of him to his mother became before long the greatest pleasure that she had : to do him some little service made her happy ; to hear others praise him brought the colour to her face : to feel that she was so little to him made her heart ache in secret. For

though they were much together, and though he was always good to her, that she *was* little to him was a hard fact that she knew well, and that she accepted meekly, but that she never forgot.

Both Margaret and Mrs. Helstone had been making much of Godfrey of late, for he had come from Oxford with some honours on his head, and of course they had killed the fatted calf for his delectation, and offered incense to him. His mother had rather a happy way of offering incense, so as to make the act pleasant and acceptable. It is an act that is not always done gracefully, but she was a graceful woman, and knew how to perform it so that it should please him. When she administered her delicate praise to him he might laugh at it, and in words reject it, but in his heart—as was natural enough—he liked it.

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They had been very happy together for a week, but on this day, when Margaret had made her ponderous bouquet, Godfrey was on the eve of taking his departure from them again for a little while.

"You must want a holiday now, my dear," his mother had said to him when she saw him first. "You look well, certainly—not as if you had been over-worked at all—but still you must really be in need of a thorough rest."

"I am not so sure about being in need of one," Godfrey replied; "but I think of taking one. I have promised Dallas to go for a month's fishing with him on the Trent."

And accordingly he was on the eve now of starting on this expedition. He was rather an ardent fisher—his intended companion was a man whom he liked—the

weather was all that weather at the end of June ought to be.

Mrs. Helstone and Margaret were to spend the summer, as they did usually, at the Dene, for to Mrs. Helstone there was no pleasanter place than her own house, with its beautiful gardens, whose perfect keeping she made the one great luxury that she permitted herself; and where her aunt was, there Margaret was content to be. These too, you see, were only a pair of quiet, country ladies. The elder had moved in the world once, but that was long ago, and she had lost her taste now for the amusements she might have cared for in her youth; while as for Margaret, she had never known them. It was a dull life, perhaps, that they led, but they were tolerably unconscious of its dulness. They had their little round of duties, of pleasures, of

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sociabilities—their mild interests, their placid occupations.

They sat on this last evening that Godfrey was to spend with them, sewing in the long June daylight. They had always some dainty work—embroidery that, like Penelope's web, seemed never-ending—to employ their fingers on. For nearly all his life Godfrey had seen the same sort of thing in his mother's hands. They sat near one of the windows to catch the latest light, and Godfrey, ensconced comfortably in an arm-chair opposite, alternately read and talked to them, claiming their silence or their attention, as it pleased him.

It was a long-shaped room, with a line of windows opening on the garden,—a pretty room, as Godfrey liked to know. For Godfrey was fond of his house too. He cared for its air of refinement, its

sobriety, its unostentatious comfort; he appreciated all that it owed to his mother's taste. He liked the placid life, too, that Mrs. Helstone and Margaret led in it, feeling that such a life satisfied his sense of the fitness of things, for he was a Conservative of rather a stiff type, and had no new-fashioned ideas about women or women's work, nor any desire to see them taking a prominent place in the world, either in the van or the rear of the battle: he preferred vastly to see them sitting, as he saw his mother and Margaret sitting now, sewing those pieces of embroidery whose use he had never learnt, whose completion seemed never reached.

They worked while the light served them, and then in the twilight Mrs. Helstone said, "Give us a little music

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Margaret," and Margaret went to the piano, and played a piece or two, and sang a song. The pieces were what are called drawing-room pieces, the song too was a drawing-room song. Her execution of them was very correct. Godfrey listened to it with half an ear. He said "Thank you!" very cordially when the girl rose from her seat; but I do not think the performance had charmed him. Perhaps by this time he knew all Margaret's songs by heart, and had forgotten that to be charmed with them was a thing that could be expected of him. He said "Thank you," and then added something else pleasantly as she came back to the place that she had left.

"I heard one of Wilson's sisters singing something the other night that I thought would suit your voice," he said. "I must

find out the name of it. Her voice is not so good as yours, only she has—practised more, perhaps.”

“Margaret does not practise nearly as much as she should; I am always telling her so,” Mrs. Helstone said. “Perhaps she needs some new music to give her more interest. I am very forgetful, or I would make her get some.”

“Oh, it is not that. I have music enough,” Margaret answered quickly.

And then Godfrey made a remark about something else—changing the subject, perhaps purposely. He was a kindly man, and he liked Margaret, but in his heart he knew that he found her dull. He knew that she would never sing or play so as to give pleasure to any intelligent human creature. He felt that her talk wanted life and light, and that in her composition

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some element that is of the essence of sweet womanhood had been left out.

But yet, if she ever wearied or irritated him he was quick to reproach himself for his weariness, and to call to mind all her virtues—her unselfishness, and loyalty, and truth, and goodness. “She is better—really a better and higher creature—than nine-tenths of the girls one knows,” he would tell himself, trying (though sometimes trying in vain) to warm his appreciation of her into enthusiasm. Once to her face he said impulsively, “I think, Margaret, you are the best woman in the world!” an unwise speech to make perhaps, for though probably he himself forgot the warm expression afterwards, you may imagine whether or not *she* forgot it.

He was kind and pleasant to her to-night when the singing was over. It was

a starlight night, and he invited her presently to go out into the garden with him and look at the stars. She knew a good deal about the stars—possibly rather more than he did. Perhaps as they stood together, gazing upwards, she even wearied him a little by the amount of knowledge she displayed. It was to enjoy an æsthetic not a scientific pleasure that he had called her out into the soft June night, and, to tell the truth, after ten minutes he yawned. He found by the end of that time that he had had enough of the heavenly bodies.

They walked two or three times up and down the gravel walk beneath the drawing-room windows. The lights from the room made a subdued illumination on their path. Mrs. Helstone, sitting alone within, heard their advancing and retreating steps and voices, and the sounds were pleasant to

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her, and set her dreaming her favourite dream, the one that she dreamt daily. "Surely it is only a question of time; they are so much together," she thought, "and he likes her, and values her. Some men are caught merely by a pretty face, but Godfrey is not one of these. He wants sterling qualities—real worth,—a woman he can respect and trust, as well as love. And he does respect and trust Margaret; I am sure of that. If only he might love her too! But, living with her in the house, seeing her always, getting to know her thoroughly—surely, in time, the love will come!"

So she sat thinking to herself; but, all too soon to content her, the footsteps presently paused at the open window, and she gave a little sigh as, after their twenty minutes' absence, her son and Margaret came back into the room.



CHAPTER II.

MR. HELSTONE and his friend were to meet at the inn of Brentwood, a village on the Trent, but when Godfrey reached this place upon the following day, he found not Mr. Dallas, but a letter from him, postponing his arrival until the next afternoon. The delay did not matter to Godfrey. "I'll try and get a basket of fish before he comes," he only thought. So he went to bed that night after having taken a survey of the river, and the next morning prepared to begin his sport.

It was a grey morning, warm but sunless, with a rather too active soft south wind.

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Godfrey chose his position, and arranged his line. The place was pretty—green and solitary ; an English, home-like scene, such as was pleasant in the young man's eyes. The river made a bend near where he stood ; on the opposite bank there was a belt of trees that, if he had been a painter, he thought he should like to sketch ; stretching far away on either side were wide green meadows, dotted with wandering sheep. It was all so quiet that for a long time he heard no sound except the singing of the birds, and sometimes the low of cattle far away. There was a little splash in the river now and then as some water-duck descended on it ; but except for such occasional sounds the silence was unbroken for so long, that Godfrey at last, to relieve it, said aloud to himself, " Upon my word, this *is* a quiet place ! "

Just at that moment, however, the wind caught his line and discomposed him. He had drawn it out of the water to throw it afresh, and in the act of re-arranging it a sudden gust came and whirled it round the rod. As he shook it free, the same unfortunate breeze attacked his hat. He clapped his hand to his head, but the action came too late. The hat was light, and before Godfrey could prevent it, the covering that had so lately adorned him was first uplifted in the air, and then tossed into the river out of reach.

He threw out his line and tried to catch it, but that effort failed, and it went floating buoyantly down the stream. "I suppose I must get my things off and go after it," he thought next to himself; so he laid down his rod, and was in the act of throwing off his coat, when, giving a glance round

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to assure himself that his solitude was still unbroken, he perceived to his discomfiture, advancing directly towards him across the nearest field, a pair of figures—a man and woman—whose presence brought his intended proceedings to an inevitable stop.

“Provoking!” thought Godfrey; but in the face of such an arrival he was clearly helpless, so feeling a little foolish, he took up his rod again, and rather uncomfortably aware of his uncovered head, and of the object that still, prominently conspicuous, was sailing over the surface of the water, he began with as much appearance of ease as he could assume to busy himself with the re-adjustment of his line.

He was not, however, left to this undisturbed occupation long.

“Hey day, young man, you want that hat of yours back again, don’t you?” cried

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a voice behind him, in such mellow tones, that, though the speaker was at some distance still, Godfrey heard the address distinctly. He turned as it was uttered, and gave a laugh.

“ Oh yes, I want it back. I shall get it presently,” he said.

“ Well, I should say you had better get it now,” returned the other in the same full voice. “ Whew ! Wasp ! Come—Wasp ! where are you ? Come away, lad ! ”

And then Godfrey became aware of the presence of a third invader of his solitude, in the person of a vivacious terrier, who suddenly, in reply to his master's call, precipitated himself with violence on the scene.

The strangers in a few minutes more had come near enough for Mr. Helstone to perceive that they were a hale tall man,

evidently a clergyman by his dress, and a girl who was tall too, and had clear-cut features, and frank, direct eyes, which she turned on Godfrey's face so fully, that his inability to raise his hat to her disturbed him. He bowed, however, as being all he could do, and she smiled in answer, slightly but pleasantly.

"Wasp will bring back your hat for you," she said next moment. "He is a clever dog, and he swims beautifully. Shall I send him in?" And without waiting for Godfrey's answer—"Fetch, Wasp!" she cried; and throwing a stone into the river to start him in the right direction, she stood watching while the fussy little animal in a prodigious hurry took the water, and swam out till he had seized on Godfrey's hat, and got it between his teeth.

"What a spirited little fellow!" said Mr.

Helstone. "I am sure I am very much obliged to him,—and to you."

"Yes,—Wasp is useful," replied the clergyman. "His legs save mine more runs than you would guess. Got it, lad? That's right—that's right! Bring it here." And as Wasp rushed up with his prize he took it from him, motioning Godfrey back, and shook the water off it. "There's your property, sir," he said, handing the hat back to its owner when this was done, with a laugh; "but I am afraid you will find it too wet yet for a good while to put back on your head. It's not a bad kind of hat," he continued contemplatively, plunging his hands into his pockets, and planting himself in front of Godfrey with his legs well apart, and his eyes fixed on the object under discussion. "Not a bad kind of hat, as straw hats go; but straw is too light; that

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is where it fails : it hasn't got body enough : it doesn't stick. Now a felt hat *does* stick. Look at mine. There's hardly a sou'wester blowing that would get this off my head."

"No, I suppose not," replied Godfrey with a smile.

He had done as he was directed, and had raised his eyes to his companion's wide-awake, and then, after mastering the general appearance of that covering, had withdrawn them to the face below it—a handsome, kindly, hearty face, with a look of both sense and humour in it. Godfrey liked its aspect as he glanced at it : as far as he had yet seen it he liked the girl's face too. He was not sure that it was pretty, but it had an expression of keenness that pleased him—a certain firmness in its well-cut features, and frankness in its bright

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eyes, that made him desire to look at it again.

She had had her back to him for a minute, having been forced to attend to Wasp, who, in his delight at his successful achievement, had been besetting her with entreaties to make a second trial of his powers; but she looked round again at Godfrey's response, and answered his smile with a sudden quiet laugh.

"We have winds here in winter that would blow off almost anything," she said. "It is often very stormy. The wind comes sweeping so over these fields."

"What pretty fields they are!" replied Godfrey.

"Ah yes," said the clergyman, "it's a nice country—a very nice country—a kind you don't get out of England, I'm told. If you are a stranger here you

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will find some things worth looking at."

"Well, I *am* a stranger," answered Godfrey.

"So I thought, sir ; so I supposed. If you had been in the neighbourhood before I presumed I should have remembered you. We country clergymen have a keen eye for a new-comer, you know." And with that, and with a twinkle in his eye, he laughed.

Godfrey returned the laugh. He rather liked this man, with his cheery face and mellow voice. "A friend of mine told me that the fishing here was good," he said. "I have not been very fortunate so far,"—and he glanced at his fishing-basket, which, to tell the truth, was still empty enough,— "but I only arrived last night, so I suppose I ought hardly as yet to complain."

"You won't complain if you take my

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advice and shift your ground a little," replied the other. "I've fished in this river for these five-and-twenty years, so I don't exactly speak without experience. There's a pool, now, some six or seven minutes' walk along here to your left; I've caught more fish in that pool than in any bit of water I ever whipped."

"I should like to find it out," said Godfrey quickly.

"Put up your things then, sir, and come along with us," cried the clergyman instantly. "We can walk that way as well as another. That's so; isn't it, Joanne? Tut, tut! there's no obligation in the matter. Why, man, I'm a brother of the craft!" And, silencing Godfrey, who was attempting to remonstrate, with a wave of the hand, he himself seized hold of the fishing-basket, and began to march forward with long strides.

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"I am afraid I am disturbing your walk," Godfrey said to the girl, who lingered a moment behind as he hastily gathered up his gear. "Were you not going in another direction?"

"If we were, it is of no consequence," she answered. "My father would far rather show you this pool than go anywhere else. And he would not only like to show it to you, but to stay and fish with you too," she added with a smile.

"I wish he *would* do that," exclaimed Godfrey heartily.

"What—stay and fish too?" cried the parson, throwing his head back over his shoulder (he had sharp ears apparently), and laughing one of his full laughs. "Well, it's true. I shouldn't mind if I did. But I have got a sick woman instead to go and see presently—unluckily. I'll

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come and join you another day though, if you like. I've got nothing to do to-morrow—have I, Joanne ?”

“Nothing that we know of yet,” replied the girl composedly ; “except,” she added, “that Mrs. Oakes may want you again.”

“Oh, I'll manage her,” cried the clergyman. “I'll go to her either early or late. Yes, I could come and join you to-morrow, sir.”

“I should like it greatly,” replied Godfrey, much amused.

“I'll be with you then by ten o'clock. That won't be too early for you, I am sure ? Ah,” as Godfrey made the answer that was expected, “I thought not. No hour is too early for a good angler. And now tell me your name, for if we are to have a day's sport together we must know what to call each other. Mine is Beresford. You

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will see it printed large enough, if you like, on the notice-board at the church-door. It has been up there longer than you have been in the world, young man. And this is my daughter—one of my daughters, I should say, for there are a good many more of them at home.”

Godfrey had taken his card-case from his pocket, and Mr. Beresford took the card he offered him, and, putting up his gold eye-glass, read the name and address aloud.

“ ‘Godfrey Helstone, The Dene, Lipworth.’ Godfrey Helstone,” he repeated deliberately; “that’s the way to put it, is it?—dropping the ‘Mr.’? Well, it is an affectation of simplicity. At least, I suspect, a man would have been called affected who had done it in my young days. But I find no fault with the fashion, for my

part. Helstone! I've known some Helstones in my time."

"And I have known Beresfords," replied Godfrey. "It is a fine old name."

"Ay, ay, the name's not amiss," replied the other with a touch of complacency. "We like to think we have some good blood in our veins; though, indeed, for the matter of that," he added carelessly, "there have been all kinds amongst us, and, to tell the truth, I suppose that Smith or Jones has as good a chance of turning out a hero as the best Howard or Percy of them all."

"Nevertheless we would prefer to be the Howard or the Percy," said Godfrey. And then Mr. Beresford laughed.

"True, one would," he said. "It's a weakness of human nature; and amongst the many prides of this world I don't know

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that pride of family takes rank as a very deadly one. The devil makes his own use of it, no doubt; but it's not one of his trump cards. However, that subject will keep till another time. Look here now, this is what I want to show you. You see that reach? That's the place, sir. Take your position near that thorn tree, and I think I may promise you that your basket will be heavier in an hour or two than it is now."

"It may well be that," said Godfrey with a laugh. "I am greatly obliged to you."

"No, no," returned Mr. Beresford, "you have nothing to be obliged for yet. Prove my guidance to be good before you thank me for it. I am pleased for my part to have met you, Mr. Helstone. I hope that to-morrow we shall become better

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acquainted. Twelve o'clock, isn't it, Joanne? Ah, then, I must be off. By the way, you are staying at Mrs. Turnbull's, are you?"

"At the inn?—yes," said Godfrey.

"Ah, very good, respectable people, and a nice clean, decent house. I am thinking though"—and then Mr. Beresford paused for a moment, and gave Godfrey a rapid glance—"I was going to say," he repeated, after this prudent survey, "if you have nothing better to do in the evening—you know a clergyman's door is always open, and you will be very welcome if you care to come up and spend an hour with us. I can't venture to promise you much entertainment, but—you will find a stirring house at any rate."

"I should like to come greatly," replied Godfrey with heartiness.

“Well, do so,” returned Mr. Beresford. “Come when you have had your dinner. I suppose you dine late,—and we dine early, but come when it suits you. You will find us at tea at six o’clock, and, if nothing else, you will find also an awful number of boys and girls round the table. So good-bye till evening, Mr. Helstone,—and take better care of your hat,” he added, with a parting laugh.

“I shall follow your advice, and adopt a felt one,” answered Godfrey, returning his laugh, and, in salutation to Miss Beresford, holding the still wet hat above his head.

He resumed his fishing when his visitors had left him, amused and rather pleased at the accident of their meeting. In a country place, he thought to himself, one is the better for finding interests outside oneself—

for seeing new people and new ways of life. Godfrey found fresh occupation for his thoughts in this little incident that had disturbed the solitude of his morning. "A fine-looking fellow," he said to himself, "and rather a character too, I suppose. He seems to have his quiver full of—blessings, by the way he talks of them. I wonder if this girl is the eldest of the family! A wonderfully nice face she has. If I go up to-night I'll try and have a talk with her."

"*If* I go up," Godfrey said, but in fact he had not the least doubt that he intended to go. What better thing could he do? He had no other acquaintances in the place, and by evening he should probably be tired of his own company. "Why should not I dine early too, and go to their family tea?" he found himself deliberating before many minutes had passed.

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By two o'clock he had caught a handful of trout, and was thinking of turning his steps back to the village. "I will get them to grill me one when I go in, and they can give me my chop," he had decided by this time, "and then I shall be independent, and can go to the Vicarage or not, as I like."

So he went to the inn, and ordered this meal.

"You've had some luck, sir," said Mr. Turnbull to him.

"Yes; I have had a little luck,—thanks to your clergyman, I believe," replied Godfrey.

"Ah, has the Vicar been with you? He's a rare one at handling a rod!" exclaimed Mr. Turnbull with gusto.

"So I should suppose," said Godfrey.

"And a very fine gentleman altogether.

And with a fine family," returned Mr. Turnbull.

"Oh, yes, tell me about his family," said Godfrey. "Has he got a wife?"

"A wife? Oh, bless you, yes, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Turnbull. "Why, Mrs. Beresford—she's more in the parish than the Vicar is himself. There's Mrs. Beresford, and Miss Beresford, and Miss Edith"—beginning to count on his fingers,—“and Miss Joanne, and Miss Violet, and Miss —”

"Why, they are not *all* daughters, are they?" interrupted Godfrey, amused at this catalogue of feminine names.

"All daughters? Oh no, sir—oh dear, no," cried Mr. Turnbull; "there are six young ladies and five young gentlemen."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Godfrey; Mr. Beresford might well say it was a stirring house!"

"Yes, sir, they make a good bit of life in the place," Mr. Turnbull assented. "There's some of them in the village most hours of the day; and they're a sight in church on Sundays."

"So I should think indeed!" replied Godfrey.

He went to his dinner after this, and as he ate it he began to doubt if he could have the courage to present himself at the Vicarage at six o'clock. He felt that it would be like going to face a school. "If I went later I might only have to meet them in detachments," he thought. And yet he felt anxious too to see how such a family looked *en masse*. He wondered what kind of food was provided for it. He found himself speculating as to whether, if he went, he should find Joanne cutting bread and butter; and, amused at

this thought, he began to picture the girl with her bright face engaged at that world-famed occupation till he laughed at the comparison that inevitably rose in his mind.

“I think she is a daintier creature than any German damsel is likely to have been,” he said to himself, “daintier, and made of finer stuff; at least that is the impression she has made on me. Though, to be sure, when one thinks of the troop of rough boys and girls with whom she must spend her days, perhaps the chances rather are that the daintiness and fineness are qualities of my own imagination. I shall be disenchanted, I daresay, if I go up and see her to-night.”

And yet Godfrey had nothing better to do, and he was rather curious about the girl; and so, as the church clock told the hour of six, he found himself making his

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way, according to directions he had received, along a pretty country road, which brought him presently to a garden-gate that stood wide open, with a winding path upon the other side that led him finally to Mr. Beresford's door.





CHAPTER III.

THE day had brightened, and the Vicar's garden was all ablaze with sunshine and flowers. It was an old-fashioned garden, and the house was old-fashioned too, and not picturesque, but yet a good house, substantial and four-square, of fine old red brick, weather-stained now, and nearly overgrown with ivy. It was set down on a large close-cut lawn, the green environment giving a pleasant, home-like look to it, while walks, shaded by many trees, stretched out to right and left.

"Has the first bell rang?" a boy's brisk voice shouted from the garden just after

six o'clock had struck, and a girl's from an open window answered back—"Yes!"

"Yes, it has rung, and the other will ring in a minute. You will hardly have time to wash your hands," added the girl, putting out her head, and nodding it energetically.

"Oh, all right—then I won't wash them," replied the boy, instantly sacrificing his natural longing for cleanliness to a feeling of duty. "Is everybody else in?"

"How can I tell?" replied the girl. "I have not been looking after them. There it is now!" And, as a sonorous bell rang suddenly out, her head disappeared, and the boy too, plunging his hands into his pockets, bolted in at the open door.

The bell clanged loudly, and before it ceased there came a rush of youthful feet along the floor, all approaching the same point from different quarters, and a sound

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of youthful voices, all directed towards a common centre, and into a room in which a long table was spread with cups and saucers, and bread and butter, the Vicar's sons and daughters presently came trooping—a throng of lively youngsters, looking, in truth, as Godfrey had pictured them, like a school let loose, except that boys and girls were mixed together.

The mother of this motley group was already standing in front of her own chair, a tall woman with a quick eye, and a manner that was more curt and decided than her husband's; the manner of one accustomed to rule, and whose hands were too full to leave her much time for the amenities of life.

“Take your places quietly, children,” she said. “Felix, don’t push your brother. Maude, move your elbows off the table.

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Victor, don't talk till your sister has said grace. Now—father."

This was to the Vicar, who, last of the small crowd, was entering the room with a leisurely step. His wife waited till he had taken possession of his seat, and then turned to a small person who was ensconced in a high chair on her left hand.

"Say grace, Femie," she bade her, and a tiny piping voice uttered a minute thanksgiving. And then in a moment more the silence had ceased, and the room had become like a little Babel.

This lasted for five minutes; but at the five minutes' end the door opened, and another sudden unexpected hush fell on the assembly, while more than a dozen pair of eyes fixed themselves at the same moment on Godfrey Helstone as he stood with his figure framed in the doorway; he

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gazing too, for here was the whole scene before him exactly as he had pictured it—the long table, the crowd of youngsters, the piles of bread and butter; with only this difference—that the expected bread and butter cutter was indistinguishable at a first glance from the rest. After a few moments he saw where Joanne was sitting, but he found that no mighty loaf was near her.

The Vicar rose from his seat, and greeted his guest heartily.

“Ah, so you have come! That’s right!” he said. “I am very glad to see you. Here’s my wife. Mrs. Beresford, this is Mr. Helstone. Give him a seat beside you. Come, clear off, my boy, and let Mr. Helstone sit down. They are like a swarm of bees, you see, sir. Little and big, we have got them of all kinds. Well, and did you keep

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long at your fishing? And what kind of sport did you have?"

Godfrey gave his report. For a few minutes he and the Vicar kept up a conversation together from their opposite ends of the long table—a conversation made possible by the silence that for a brief space reigned on either side; and then, as the buzz of general talk began again, he turned to Mrs. Beresford, and to a girl who, seated just opposite him, had caught his eye almost as soon as he had entered the room.

She was not Joanne, but some one with far greater pretensions to beauty than Joanne possessed—a fair girl, with dark blue eyes and golden hair. Godfrey ran his eye along all the other faces that lined the table, and said to himself emphatically that no other was like this one. Was she a daughter? he wondered, so much prettier

as she was than all the rest—even unlike them too, for none of the others had her fairness and brightness of colouring.

He said something after a little to Mrs. Beresford to draw the information from her that he wanted.

“I met one of your daughters with Mr. Beresford this morning. I am not sure whether it was your eldest daughter—?”

“Oh no—you met Joanne,” she answered. “This is my eldest—Lilian,” and she motioned to the fair-haired girl, who smiled a little and looked conscious, Godfrey thought.

This appearance of consciousness amused him. “She is the village beauty, I suppose,” he said to himself. He addressed some remark to her the next moment, and she answered it with a blush. “She is very provincial,” he thought; but yet he followed

up his first remark with a second and a third.

They rose from table presently, and the children began to stream out of the room. "What a pretty place you have here!" Godfrey had already said to Mrs. Beresford, and so, when they were on their feet, she asked him if he would care to go into the garden.

"The young people are always out of doors in this summer weather," she said. "If you will go out with them they will like it very much—and, Lilian, you might see if Mr. Helstone would have some strawberries."

So, in two minutes more, Mr. Helstone was walking towards the strawberry-beds, and Lilian was by his side. Half-a-dozen at least of the others accompanied them also, but as it was into Lilian's charge that

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Godfrey had been delivered, he thought that he was justified in claiming her attention for himself, and he accordingly walked beside her, and as he walked he talked to her.

He rather liked his position, and yet, to tell the truth, by the time he had reached the strawberry-beds he had begun to have an impression that Miss Lilian's mental gifts were not great. "If she has the beauty, I suspect that some of the others have the brains," he thought. "That bright-eyed creature that I saw this morning, for instance, has more wit, I should think, in her little finger than this one has in her whole body."

And yet he could not help feeling that Lilian was amazingly pretty, and that he liked his walk beside her, though she did not say a syllable to him that was worth

listening to, nor express an opinion that it gave him any interest to hear.

“Do you think it such a pretty country?” she said. “Oh well, I suppose it is; only I have lived here so long that I hardly know. I think it *is* nice in fine weather; but every place is nice then—isn’t it? I like London very much—don’t you? I have an aunt in London, and I was staying with her this spring, and we went about a great deal. I was very sorry to come home—I mean for some things; not for all, of course—because—oh, it would be dreadful if one didn’t like home best! but there is so much going on in London, and you meet such nice people. Don’t you think you meet very nice people?” And so she ran on. It certainly was not talk that claimed one’s attention very closely.

The very artlessness of it, however, from

such pretty lips rather entertained Godfrey. He asked her questions, and paid her beauty the compliment of listening to her simple answers. It was a very mild amusement, but in the pleasant summer evening it entertained him pretty well. When they reached the strawberry-beds he began to gather some of the fruit for her; he did not at first, though she was near him, gather any for Joanne.

They ate and talked and amused themselves. Some of the others joined them presently. Joanne joined them with Femie in her arms. Femie was a pretty, curly-headed child, and the two made a picture that it was pleasant to look at. Godfrey at least thought so.

“ You have got a sister who is very good to you, it seems to me,” he said to the little one, patting her rosy cheek.

"She has got a sister who is a dragon over her," Joanne answered with a laugh. She gave Femie a sudden kiss, and set her down. "She gets too heavy to be carried," she said. "When the summer began I used to be able to carry her pick-a-back all round the garden, but—like everybody and everything—she changes so fast."

"I wonder if *I* could carry her pick-a-back?" said Godfrey.

"Oh, Mr. Helstone!" exclaimed Lilian, in polite remonstrance; but Joanne said at once—"I am sure you could, if you wouldn't mind. Femie, wouldn't you like it? Come, you are going to have *such* a ride!" And without any hesitation she began to assist the little damsel to mount on Godfrey's shoulders, and in another moment, with her two small arms about his neck, and her two tiny feet held in his hands, Mr. Helstone

was proceeding at a brisk pace down one of the garden-walks.

The little maid was shy, and, though Godfrey spoke to her, she hardly answered him ; but Joanne had come with them, and she on her part was ready enough to talk.

“How nice it is to be strong ! I like strong people,” she said with warmth, almost as soon as they had started. “Now, I suppose you could carry a couple of Femies (if there *were* two of them), and hardly feel that you were doing anything ?”

“I think I might manage to carry two Femies,” he answered with a laugh ; “but as for not feeling that I was doing anything—that is another matter. She is a tolerably substantial little person.”

“Yes—is she not fat ? She is like a dumpling. When she tires you, you know, you must put her down.”

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“ Oh, no fear that she will tire me. Shall I give her a gallop ? ” And Godfrey took to his heels, with Joanne following fleetly after him.

The fat child laughed at this, and Joanne laughed too. They ran for two or three minutes, then they stopped to take breath.

“ Oh, Femie,” cried Joanne, “ you don’t have such a ride as this every day.”

She looked pleasantly up at Godfrey. There was something wonderfully frank and friendly in the girl’s face ; she had the charm of perfect simplicity and freedom from self-consciousness. “ Are you going to stay here long ? Are you going to be here all the summer ? ” she asked him abruptly.

The inquiry amused him. Stay a whole summer in this remote little place !

“ Oh no ; I have only come for a month,”

he said. "I have a friend who is going to join me to-morrow. We only mean to take a few weeks' fishing. Perhaps not even so much as that. It will depend upon how we like it."

"Oh, I should think you would like it," said the girl quietly. "Is your friend a young man—like yourself?"

"He is a young man. But I don't know that he is very like myself."

"I meant was he like in age. You *know* I meant that," said Joanne severely.

"I beg your pardon," answered Godfrey, laughing. "Yes, he is very like me in age. He is about three months my junior."

"And are you great friends?" asked Joanne.

Godfrey paused for a moment. He was not quite sure how to answer this question truthfully.

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"Well, we are intimate," he said after that brief silence. "We have been together a great deal at Oxford."

"Oh, you have been to college, then?" said Joanne. This seemed to give him an interest in her eyes. "And—are you going back again?"

"No,—unfortunately," he replied.

She looked at him with a little concern. His answer evidently brought another question to her lips, but evidently, too, she hesitated to ask it. He saw her difficulty, however, and relieved her from it with a laugh.

"I have not been plucked," he said. "I have taken my degree."

"Oh yes! I suppose so," she answered hastily. She blushed a little, as if she was vexed that her face had betrayed her—as if she felt that she owed the young man

some apology. "It must be delightful to do well at college," she said with a little sigh. "Has your friend taken his degree too?"

"Yes."

"And was it—a good degree?"

"Yes, very good; very good indeed."

"A first-class?"

"Yes."

"Were there many first-class men this year?"

What she wanted to find out was so evident that he could hardly keep his countenance. He gave her curiosity, however, no assistance.

"Yes," he merely said, "a good many—about as many as usual, I suppose."

"Were you very nervous?" She asked this abruptly.

"Moderately," he said.

"Perhaps—you felt pretty sure that you were going to do well?"

"Not at all; I felt quite the other way."

"Then you must have been very pleased?"

"At finding that they let me pass? Oh yes, I was pleased, of course. Most people, you see, have somebody to be interested in them, and if they had not passed me my mother would have been disappointed,—naturally. Well, little maid," and he turned his head round to Femie, "shall we have another run?" And suiting the action to the word, off he set again, and gave the child a second gallop, that brought the colour both to her face and his own.

He ran, and Joanne ran too. The girl was as light and swift of foot as a young roe.

"Now put her down," she said, when at last they stopped. "This is enough for once. She is such an extortionate little monkey that she would keep you in her service all the evening if you let her ; but I would rather you did not carry her any more now. That's right !—and thank you very much. You are not tired, I hope ?" asked the girl in her direct way.

He laughed. He had deposited Femie on the ground. He was a little hot, but as for feeling fatigue from such a small exertion as this—! "Why, if I had run a mile you need hardly ask me such a question," he said.

"I beg your pardon," she answered quickly. "But people are so different, you see ; one never knows. Are you fond of doing active things ? I suppose you are ?"

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"Yes; I am rather accustomed to doing active things," he said.

"Rowing, and running, and skating, and hunting? Do you do all those?"

"Yes—more or less."

"And you have got a mother?"

"Yes—if there is any connection."

"I didn't mean to suggest that there was any connection; but you *have* a mother?"

"Oh yes."

"And a father?"

"No; my father is dead."

"Oh, what a pity!" sympathetically.

"Was it long ago?"

"Three years ago. He died just before I came of age."

"That was sad for you. I am sorry," said Joanne gently. "And how many more are there of you?"

"No more at all."

"You have no brothers nor sisters?"

"Not one."

"Oh dear! And I have *ten*!" Joanne ejaculated—this almost below her breath. "How fond your mother must be of you!"

"Do you think that is a natural consequence?"

She glanced at him for a moment, and then she gave a little laugh.

"Well, I suppose I did think it was," she said. "But I may be wrong,—of course."

"My mother has a sort of adopted daughter. Perhaps that fact may make her less entirely absorbed in me than you seem to think probable."

"Oh!" said Joanne, and her face showed interest.

"Yes—a niece, who has lived with her for the last two years."

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"That must be a pleasure to her."

"It is a great pleasure. She is a very good girl."

"And she is your cousin?"

"Yes."

"And young?"

"Yes; one-and-twenty."

"Of course that must make a great difference."

"It must make me of a good deal less importance, you mean, than you first thought I was?"

"No; I mean it must make your home much more lively."

"I suppose it does." But Godfrey's tone was not quite the tone of a man who was very ardently convinced of this; and Joanne glanced at him, evidently with other questions on her lips which, if she had been bolder, she would have liked to ask.

She did not ask them, however, and after a moment or two her attention was turned to something else.

The sun was getting low, and throwing slanting shadows on the grass, and amidst the sunshine and the shadow a handful of the Vicar's sons and daughters were playing croquet (for this was before the days of tennis).

"And *you* ought to be playing too," cried Joanne suddenly, as they came in their stroll within sight of the lawn, and within sound of the mallets. "Look, you can take Victor's place. I will tell him." And she would have gone forward to effect this substitution if Godfrey had not stopped her.

"No, pray let Victor alone," he said. "I would rather look on if you would let me. And which of these lads *is* Victor, by the way? for, you see, except your eldest sister

and yourself, I don't so far know one of you from another."

"No, you must be very much puzzled by us all as yet," answered Joanne laughing. "We are a dreadful family for a stranger to be thrown into the midst of. And I don't know that it is much use at present to tell you which of us is which, for you will be sure to forget again immediately. However, if you like, I can tell you our names at least. Look—Victor is that fair boy, and the other with darker hair is Felix. Lilian, as you say, you know; then there, in the green dress, is my second sister, Edith; I come after her; then there are these two boys, Victor and Felix; and then—" She looked to right and left of her, but after this inspection shook her head. Maude and Violet should be somewhere, but I don't see them—they are two dear little

souls ; and I don't see Tom either. *There* are two more of them, though—those little ones sitting on the grass—they are Harry and Dick. And then there is little Femie. And—that's all," she said.

It might well be all, Godfrey thought to himself. The sight of such a family was a thing to make a man feel grave.

"And is this holiday time? or are you always like this—all of you together here, I mean?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "this is our natural condition. You see—" and then she hesitated, but only for a moment,—“it would cost a great deal to send so many children to school, so papa teaches the bigger boys, and Edith and I teach the rest. We have quite a little school-room full, and I think it is rather nice work. Lilian doesn't like it, so we don't make her help. Besides, it is pleasant,

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of course, for mamma to have one daughter free. It *is* holiday time just now; you were right in guessing that. We broke up school at the end of last week, and we are to be allowed to play now for a month."

"You must be rather glad when you are allowed to play, I should think," Godfrey said, and then the girl laughed.

"Oh, I like it in the summer," she said. "I think everybody likes to be idle then. My father and I are so much out of doors together when we have no teaching to do, and I get long days of sketching sometimes. Yes; it is a very nice time. I hope the weather will be fine this year."

"I hope it will," Godfrey said.

He was watching Lilian at her game, and thinking how well she played it. She was a pretty figure in her light summer dress, with her graceful movements, and her

gold-crowned head. She eclipsed Joanne, he thought, as a full moon might eclipse a star. But yet Godfrey was content enough to be standing by Joanne's side. Her talk amused him more than Lilian's. The best part of Lilian was her face.

"What—do you not play croquet too, Mr. Helstone?" cried the Vicar's sonorous voice, as his stalwart figure came presently across the lawn. "I thought all the young men played croquet now."

"Oh yes, I play," answered Godfrey, "when an additional hand is needed. But you are happily so well supplied here—"

"Ah, yes; we have hands enough, and feet enough—and tongues enough, too," replied Mr. Beresford. "These youngsters are bothering me for another croquet-ground. They say one isn't enough—and, to tell the truth, it's seldom I find that one of anything

is enough here. Mrs. Beresford finds some difficulty in making one house do—and *I* find considerable difficulty, I can tell you,” —with a cheery laugh—“in managing with one income. I think, for my own part, that there ought to be a State provision for—for this sort of thing.”

“It would be a very wise and reasonable arrangement,” said Godfrey.

“Well—I think so. And I would be strictly moderate: I would simply ask for a hundred pounds a-head. That would keep us going easily. However, if we might be better off, we might, thank God, be worse—and if the birds are too many for the nest, still the nest, I think, is a cosy enough one.” And the Vicar turned and surveyed his substantial house with a look that confessed not only to satisfaction but even to pride in it.

“Yes; the nest is a delightful one,” replied

Godfrey, cordially. "I don't know where one would go to find a pleasanter spot altogether. Or a prettier scene than this," he added, turning to the croquet-ground again, where the young ones were still at play, with Lilian's golden head still catching the sunbeams.

"Well, for all the trouble they give us they would need to please our eyes—and our hearts—sometimes," answered the Vicar, with a half-laugh; and then he moved away. "Come with me, and I'll take you to see one of our best views," he said. "It is not to be called a fine country about here, you know, but it gets to have a charm to those who become familiar with it. And there's a bit over here that I'm uncommonly fond of. Come away, Joanne. Joanne and I take our walk this way most summer evenings. It's only a step to the view I am

going to show you ; but you will say it's worth looking at, I hope."

"I think almost any view would be worth looking at on such a perfect evening," Godfrey answered.

"Do you see the pines there, across the sunset ? That's fine, isn't it ?" said the Vicar, after a few moments.

They had left the garden behind them, and were crossing a meadow that rose upwards to a little hill, crowned with a belt of trees. They mounted this small eminence in a few moments, and there an extensive view stretched itself out before them of wood and pasture land, broken into picturesque heights and glades, all lying golden in the evening sun.

It was a lovely scene, Godfrey thought and said. The day was nearly ending, and flecked clouds in the west were getting

touched with crimson, and the dark stems of the pine trees stood out clear-cut against the background of an amber sky.

"Do you ever come here to paint?" Godfrey asked Joanne, but the girl shook her head.

"It is too wide a view for me," she said. "I only sketch in the woods. I know so little about painting, really."

"Yes; she knows very little about it," Mr. Beresford answered; "but she has a true sort of feeling for it, it seems to me. It is a kind of thing that is in my family. I had a terrible itching myself when I was a lad to be an artist. I took my paint-box and my easel on my back once, and spent a summer's holiday down in Sussex painting the commons and the downs there; and, upon my word, I had a hard matter afterwards to get over it. I had already made

up my mind to be a parson, and in the end a parson, you see, I became ; but it was touch and go with me for the matter of a twelvemonth or more. Yes ; Joanne is like her father : she would give her ears to be an artist, too."

" I should like to have some proper teaching—some teaching that was really good," said the girl, quietly. " It is not that I might be an artist—I could never hope to be that—but I would rather know how to paint a little than be able to do anything else."

" We go about together looking for effects," said the Vicar with a laugh. " That is the little entertainment we two keep for ourselves. Those other boys and girls of mine have—the whole ten of them—no more love of art than they have—happily—of artifice, so Joanne and I go our

own way,—and keep our own counsel, for the most part. For you see, Mr. Helstone,” said the Vicar with a twinkle in his eye, “the clergyman of a parish is supposed by the bulk of his parishioners to have no other interest except the cure of souls, and should he by chance *feel* some other, he had better keep a quiet tongue about it, lest the weaker brethren should take offence.”

“But how do you reconcile this precept with your practice of the noble art that—I hope we are to enjoy together to-morrow?” Godfrey asked a little maliciously.

“What—with fishing?” exclaimed Mr. Beresford, in no way taken aback by the question. “My dear sir, fishing is permitted to the whole body of the clergy! You could scarcely mention a more clerical

pursuit. Why, the apostles were fishermen."

"Oh, if you come to that, one of the apostles was a painter," said Godfrey.

"So he was, and, to tell the truth, I have sometimes thought of taking my stand upon that fact; only it is not worth while. Always, if you can, sir, avoid shocking worthy souls. As for the question of fishing, however," added the Vicar with vehemence, "that's another matter altogether. Fishing is an occupation that in the highest degree promotes meditation."

"So does smoking," said Godfrey.

"Well, sir, and I have known some very excellent clergymen who smoke. I don't advise the practice; I don't perhaps care to see a man of my cloth adopt it; but yet I can well imagine that a pipe may help one not a little on occasion to solve

a knotty point of theology. At any rate *I* can truly say that I have thought out some of my best sermons with my fishing-rod in my hand."

"And *I* can say as truly that I hope you will long continue to do so," replied Godfrey cordially.

"I always thank God for these long summer days," said the Vicar, as they presently turned and descended the little hill again; "I think they are one of His best boons to us. I like to utter a prayer at sunrise, if I am awake to see it, and I seldom miss a thanksgiving when the sun goes down. Ah, it would be a glorious world, if it weren't for the hand the devil has in it."

"It is a glorious world, it seems to me, even taken along with that drawback," answered Godfrey; and then the Vicar

laughed, though along with his laughter he shook his head.

“You haven’t got my five-and-fifty years upon your shoulders yet,” he said. “Your eyes will have more sights to see, Mr. Helstone, and your heart more burdens to bear before you’re my age. However, I’ve had a happy life,” he added, “thank God for it,” and he lifted his hat for a moment from his head, though whether only to shift its position, or as an act of reverence, Godfrey did not feel that he knew enough of the man to say.

The croquet players had ended their game when the Vicar and his companion returned from their stroll, and as they regained the garden Godfrey looked at his watch, and thought that it behoved him to make some overture towards departure. But Mr. Beresford’s cordial—“Tut, tut, sir,

it's early yet. You must take a morsel of supper with us presently," induced him willingly enough to delay his going. Indeed, to tell the truth, he had every desire to stay, for he liked his quarters; the family amused, and even already in one or two of its members interested, him; and he had not forgotten that Lilian was worth looking at.

That pretty damsel was coming towards him now, she and two sisters with her; on her right hand the one whom they called Edith, on her left a bright, round-faced little maiden of more tender years, with sweet dark eyes that Godfrey thought were like Joanne's.

Mr. Helstone went forward to meet the group.

"I hope you have won your game?" he said to Lilian.

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But before she could answer—"Then you hope *I* have lost?" the other sister struck in mischievously—"That is not civil, Mr. Helstone."

"I am afraid it is not; but one of you *must* have lost, you see," replied Godfrey, not at all taken aback; "and as Miss Beresford is my earliest acquaintance"—

"Well, I did win, I am glad to say," exclaimed Lilian complacently; and then Edith laughed.

"She always wins," she said; "it's no use trying to beat her, for she plays ever so much better than all the rest of us. I wonder if you could beat her?" and she looked speculatively at Godfrey. "I wish you would try."

"I should like to try—or, at least, I should like to have a game with you some evening—very much indeed," Godfrey

replied ; " only I am not sure but that you are not all better players than I am."

" Oh, you won't find that," Edith answered carelessly ; and Lilian made a more polite speech, at which, however, Godfrey smiled to himself, for he saw that the beauty was quite aware of her proficiency, and her self-satisfaction rather piqued him to try his strength at some future time against her.

They began to walk round the garden in the twilight. Somebody called the little dark-eyed person off to bed, and Godfrey took her place by Lilian's side, and she and he and Edith strolled and talked for half-an-hour. Their talk was very simple, as the young man perfectly well knew ; indeed he knew it so well that he yawned once as he was listening to Lilian, and yet his consciousness

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of the girl's beauty made him like her company well enough. Edith was a brighter girl than her eldest sister. Whatever sparkle was contributed to the conversation by either of them was given to it by her.

They walked and talked till the supper-bell called them into the house, to a homely, old-fashioned meal. "Such a meal as you are not much accustomed to, I imagine, Mr. Helstone," the Vicar said as he took his seat; "but you are wise enough, I hope, to do at Rome as the Romans do." And indeed Godfrey found his appetite by no means wanting.

"I think the Romans' ways are very pleasant ones," he said, with a cordiality that was quite unfeigned.

They ate their supper, and then the clock struck ten, and, afraid of staying

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any longer, lest he should infringe upon the household's probable primitive hour of retirement, Godfrey rose at the sound of it, and took his leave.

"I have had a most pleasant evening," he said to Mrs. Beresford, as he shook hands with her. "I should have spent a very different one if I had been alone at my inn."

"Oh dear, yes; I have no opinion of young men spending their evenings at inns," replied the lady quickly; and then, with a gravity that evidently implied a doubt lest the temptations of his position at Mrs. Turnbull's might prove too much for him, she proceeded to assure Mr. Helstone that she should be happy to see him at her house again. "Evidently looking upon me as a brand to be snatched at any cost from the burning," as Godfrey said to his

friend with a laugh next day. At the moment, however, he gave no sign of amusement, but only endeavoured to express his thanks. He had no disinclination to be invited to repeat his visit. "I shall be only too pleased to come again," he said.

The Vicar walked down to the gate with him.

"I think the weather looks well for our fishing to-morrow," he said cheerily. "I shall be with you by ten o'clock, so be on your mettle, and don't let an old man get the advantage of you."

"No fear of that," replied Godfrey, laughing; "you will find me at my post."

He shook Mr. Beresford's hand warmly. There was a breadth and heartiness about the man that had taken his fancy. He was not an ideal parish priest perhaps, but

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he was full of human sympathy and vigour, and Godfrey, as he walked home to his inn, found himself looking forward to the next day's companionship with a very unequivocal sense of pleasure.





CHAPTER IV.

THE day broke clear and fair, and Godfrey walked down to the river rather before his appointed time, and had taken his position and baited his line before Mr. Beresford joined him. The church clock, however, had only just struck ten when the Vicar made his appearance, rod in hand, and basket slung on his shoulder, and with his face as cheerful as the summer morning.

“True to your tryst, sir!” he cried in his mellow voice as he came near. “That’s right, Mr. Helstone. Punctuality is a virtue I have a great regard for. When I can trust a man to do a thing at the time he

says he'll do it, I always feel disposed to think that he is worth trusting in other ways as well. Come now, let us see what sport we are going to have." And with all the ardour of five-and-twenty, the Vicar, disencumbering himself of his gear, began at once to buckle to his work.

They spent some hours together, and at the end of them Godfrey thought and said, that he had had a pleasant morning. Not indeed that his fishing had been remarkably successful, for the fish had proved shy, and had hardly risen so readily as the Vicar's sanguine hopes had led him to expect that they would; but the day was lovely, the scene had a peaceful beauty about it that he found delightful, and his companion's frank and genial talk had entertained him admirably.

Mr. Beresford, indeed, was a man who,

as he put it himself, had no unnatural aversion to the sound of his own voice. "Our tongues are given us for our service, as it seems to me," he said to Godfrey, "and, for my own part, I confess I rarely come within hail of a fellow-creature but I like to speak to him, and if he gives me back my speech honestly, I feel a strong temptation to speak again. Here in these quiet parts we all run some risk of rusting, you see. Our world is too little a one to give us material enough to whet our wits upon. I always feel to a stranger as if he were a bit of fresh food, and I go at him with an appetite."

And, indeed, Godfrey thought, the Vicar justified his assertion, but, though he laughed as he thought this, he at the same time liked the man for his frank confession.

"I think you have the best of it on the

whole in these quiet places," he said. "Where human beings are more plentiful we not unfrequently find them bores."

"Ay, ay," returned the Vicar, "in the big world no doubt you get hard to please. And you young fellows—you young men fresh from college especially—you turn up your noses at your kind, as it appears to me, a vast deal more than is wise. I don't mean this as a personal charge, Mr. Helstone; but you are one of a class; and, of a large portion of that class, I say, that a more conceited lot of young puppies I don't think exists anywhere on the face of the earth."

"I am sure, long before I am your age, I shall quite agree with you," said Godfrey laughing.

"No doubt you will! No doubt of it at all," exclaimed the Vicar. "A large percentage even of the puppies themselves will

agree to it in ten years' time. By the way, what sort of a person is that young friend of yours who is coming? *He* doesn't belong to the fraternity, I hope—does he?"

"What—of puppies?" asked Godfrey. "Well, perhaps I am hardly the best person to answer that question,—either as to him or myself; but, speaking from my own point of view, on the whole, I should say—no. I rather hope that you will like him—that is, if you will be good enough to let him become acquainted with you."

"And if he will be good enough to accept the acquaintance, perhaps you should add," said the Vicar; "for after what I have been confessing, you may very well think that there won't be much reluctance upon my side. *I* shall be ready enough to have a try at him. He has been a college chum of yours, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Godfrey, "we have been intimate for two or three years."

"It's not, however, a sort of Pylades and Orestes' friendship?"

"Oh dear no!" exclaimed Godfrey. "We have been thrown a good deal together, and we are both fond of fishing, and have a few other tastes in common; but that is all."

"You think him a good fellow, though?"

"Oh yes. I am sure he is a good fellow," replied Godfrey cordially.

The Vicar was putting up his things preparatory to departure, for this bit of talk had taken place at the end of their morning. It was half-past twelve o'clock, and at half-past twelve, he had told Godfrey, he must betake himself home. "For my clerical fetters are not very heavy on me, but yet it behoves me not to forget

altogether that I have to wear them," he said with a laugh.

Before, however, they had parted company, Godfrey, turning his head, said quickly, "There is Wasp!" and the next moment that irrepressible terrier came bounding across the meadow, aiming, as for dear life, at the Vicar's legs.

"If Wasp is here his mistress can't be far off," said Mr. Beresford; and in fact in another moment or two they saw Joanne's figure in the distance, approaching them rapidly with brisk, elastic steps. "Ah, she is come with some message for me!" exclaimed the Vicar rather mournfully, and his surmise proved correct, for as soon as she came within speaking distance she addressed him.

"I hoped I should find you still here," she said. (She merely bowed to Godfrey,

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with a brief "Good morning.") "I am so sorry to hurry you away, but I thought I had better come, for poor Mrs. Oakes has sent a message for you. She is suddenly worse, her daughter says. I am afraid they think she is dying."

"Oh, poor soul! Then I'll be off to her at once," cried the Vicar. "I'll just go straight there. Can you carry my things home, Joanne?"

"I will carry them," cried Godfrey interposing.

"There is no need," said Joanne.

"No, there is no need," echoed the Vicar, "but I'll leave you to settle the matter between you. I'm sorry I must go. We have had a very pleasant morning, Mr. Helstone."

"We have indeed," replied Godfrey heartily.

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And then when they had shaken hands, and Mr. Beresford had turned his back, Godfrey began to gather up their gear.

"You need not do that," said Joanne abruptly.

"Why need I not do it?" he inquired. "You can't imagine, I am sure, that I will let you take up those things yourself?"

"No, I don't suppose you will; I see you won't," she said; "but if you will carry them with you to the inn when you go back I will send for them from there."

"And why in the world should I do that?" he asked.

"Because if you come with me now you will break your morning," she said.

"I like to break my morning," he answered.

And then she merely shook her head, and with a laugh he shouldered his load.

They walked a little way in silence, but before the end of a minute she made an abrupt remark.

"This is the misfortune of being a woman!" she said.

"So it is," he answered. And then, after a moment, "Do you consider it a misfortune to be a woman?" he inquired rather mischievously.

"I do when I can't get my own way," she said instantly.

"And is that a thing that happens often?"

"I don't know that it happens often, but it is happening just now," she replied with vivacity. And then she half-laughed and blushed a little. "You see I am so accustomed to be independent," she said with a certain explanatory apology in her tone.

"Ah yes, but you should guard yourself

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against a love of independence," he answered gravely. "All these pleasant little vices have such a way of growing on one. Self-dependence soon leads, you know, to self-indulgence, and then, when you are once a slave to that, there's nothing you mayn't do."

She broke all at once into a clear fresh laugh that sounded so pleasant that he laughed too for sympathy.

"You took me in for a moment. I thought you were in earnest," she said.

"But I *am* in earnest," he answered. "I think it is a great mistake in a lady to try to be independent. The less independent she is the better."

"And the more dependent, I suppose, she is on—you, the better too?" Miss Beresford suggested a little scornfully.

"Yes; that is exactly what I mean.

Women ought to be dependent on men. When they are left to themselves of course they must serve themselves, but when they have a man beside them they must make *him* serve them."

"I think," said Joanne, "they would sometimes find it very difficult to do that."

They were walking across the meadow with the sunshine in their eyes, and with the fields with their ripening crops lying stretched out on either side. This walk was a portion of the morning's entertainment on which Godfrey had not calculated, but he enjoyed it none the less for that. He was a man quite capable of making the most of such things ; not one who was likely to let even minute pleasures slip past him unappreciated, for want of quickness to recognize their power to give enjoyment. It pleased

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him very consciously at this moment to be treading the grass at Joanne Beresford's side ; the girl was a kind of girl he liked to talk to, honest, and quick-witted, and frank ; and as for her looks—hers was one of those faces that charm without regular beauty ; whose brightness and mobility give them all the fascination that they need.

Perhaps they both enjoyed their walk. Godfrey at any rate did, and thought it a pity that it should be so short a one. They walked and talked for ten minutes, and then the house was close at hand ; the gate was at hand too that led from the fields into a side-walk of the garden.

Mr. Helstone lifted the latch and they passed through. There was a sound in the air of boys at play, but their voices came from some unseen region : the large grass plot before the house lay deserted in the

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sunshine, the *jalousies* were down before the windows.

“You will come in—will you not?” Joanne said; but Godfrey answered “No.” He could not, it seemed to him, intrude himself into a house in which he was almost a stranger at half-past twelve in the day.

“No, I won’t come in just now,” he said; “but Mr. Beresford has been good enough to ask me to bring up my friend Dallas some evening—”

“Oh yes, we shall be glad to see Mr. Dallas,” replied Joanne.

“So, if you please, I will just in the mean time take this basket round to the kitchen—” suggested Godfrey.

But Joanne laid her hand upon it with a laugh.

“If you please—you will do nothing of

the kind," she answered. "The sight of you would quite give the cook a turn. *I* am going to take it now—and thank you very much."

"Ah, you thank me with your lips, but in your heart, I believe, you owe me a grudge yet," Godfrey said, shaking his head.

It had been a pleasant quarter of an hour, he thought, as he went his way homewards after this. He had a sense that the whole morning had been well spent. "I like these Beresfords; and I like the father and this daughter especially," he told himself. "I wonder what Dallas will think of them!" And then he began to plan how he would take Mr. Dallas up upon the following evening, if his friend had no other scheme of his own. "That will not be too soon to go," he thought, "and I imagine

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they are pretty well always at home in the evening. At any rate, if we time our arrival so as to catch them as they rise from tea—”

He had seen them *at* tea once, and he told himself that it would be unnecessary to present himself a second time at that ceremonial. “We can dine pretty early, and come up about seven o’clock,” he thought. “Dallas won’t mind the supper, I think. Indeed, that is rather a nice little affair, with the girls all present at it, and most of the others comfortably tucked up.”

He did not feel inclined to go back to his fishing after the interruption it had met with, so he dropped the proceeds of his morning’s labours at the inn, and went for a walk. It was a country that made no extravagant demands upon his admiration,

but it was pretty and picturesque in a quiet way that Godfrey liked. He had travelled of late years a good deal, and had begun to show a little tendency to fall into the affectation of saying that he had left off caring for what is called fine scenery. He professed to be rather sick of mountains, and on the whole to prefer plains. The state of mind into which he had fallen on this subject was one perhaps brought on by too close intercourse with members of the Alpine Club. At any rate the condition of his taste served Godfrey to some purpose at the present moment, for the country round Brentwood boasted of few features that could charm an eye seeking for what was large or grand. It was a homely country, very green and pastoral, rich with its waving crops, bright with its June roses in the hedgerows,

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beautiful with a wealth of trees, and with a few soft hills, and with the ever fresh sweetness of the river ; but, beyond these, possessing few attractions, except, on a day like this, the splendour of the summer sun, that would have thrown a glory over even many a less lovely scene.

Godfrey had his ramble and enjoyed it. There had been little in his lot as yet to interfere with his enjoyment of anything. He walked beneath the trees, thinking pleasantly of many things ; of his life, past and future ; of home and his mother and Margaret ; of the place in which he was now, and his surroundings in it. " I wouldn't marry that girl, Lilian," he found himself suddenly saying, " in spite of her pretty face,—I wouldn't marry her or one of her kind, I think, for ten thousand a year ! I would a world rather have the

other one. Not that she either is the sort of girl one would fall in love with. At least I think not—and certainly, at any rate, her family is not the sort one would ever have a mind to marry into. Ten brothers and sisters! Good heavens, one's house would never be free from them!" And he both laughed and shuddered at the picture that his fancy drew of what his life would be attended by such troops of his wife's relations—boys wanting to be helped to start in life—girls perhaps getting into trouble over their love affairs. "Something would be for ever happening to one or another of them," he thought, "and she would be perpetually flying off right and left to help them. I shouldn't like it. I should prefer to have a wife whose family affections had not so terribly wide a field for development."

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And so, as he walked home, Godfrey came to a clear decision in his own mind that he would not let himself be taken captive by the bright eyes of Joanne Beresford.





CHAPTER V.

"I AM afraid it will be rather a bore, you know," said Jack Dallas.

"Oh, I don't think you will find it a bore," replied Godfrey. "One can't live in a place and know nobody."

"No, one doesn't want to know nobody; but there is a great difference," said Mr. Dallas gravely, "between knowing nobody, and knowing such a troop as this."

And then Godfrey laughed. "You will soon pick out one or two from the troop," he said.

Jack Dallas was an active, well-made man, though neither so tall nor so good-

looking as Godfrey ; with a pleasant voice, and an easy, frank, genial manner that made him rather a favourite generally. He had on the whole more popular qualities than his friend, and possessed a power of making himself at home with his company that had often served him in good stead. He treated the world pleasantly, as a man does who feels he has his welcome place in it, and his world, liking his confidence, for the most part treated him pleasantly in return.

“ Well, I suppose I shall have to go and see them,” he said. “ I would rather, for my own part, lie under a tree to-night and smoke my pipe, but they evidently want to be civil, and *you* are in for it already, so I’ll bow to destiny and go and change my coat.”

And he changed his coat accordingly,

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and in ten minutes the two young men had started on their walk.

They had been fishing all the morning, with a good deal of mutual content.

"I should not wonder but that the Vicar would come and look after us," Godfrey said once; but Mr. Beresford did not come, and they had had their bit of the river to themselves, undisturbed.

"You will admire Miss Lilian," Godfrey said now, as they walked together up the road.

"I dare say I shall," replied Mr. Dallas placidly.

"She rather reminds me," said Godfrey, "of that pretty cousin of the Fergusons'. You know the girl."

"Know her! Why, I'm head over ears in love with her!" exclaimed Mr. Dallas.

"If she is like Aggy Ferguson she may well be a beauty."

"Well, she *is* a beauty," said Godfrey. "She is an uncommonly pretty girl. I don't know that she has much brains."

"Oh, brains be hanged!" exclaimed Mr. Dallas. "The less she has of *them* the better. I'm sick of clever girls."

"So am I—of some of them," replied Godfrey more cautiously.

"Here we are," he said in five minutes more, and he opened the garden-gate, and they walked up the little avenue. As they approached the house, they saw through the trees the movement of women's dresses, and heard the mingled sound of many voices.

"They are at home at any rate," said Mr. Dallas drily. "It is a delightful thing to have one's family so constituted that the

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very air is filled with it, and you are conscious of its presence from afar. I don't know that such an experience ever suggested itself to me before. If the eleven were one's own property, now, one might imagine the thrill of fine emotion—"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Godfrey quickly.
"There is the Vicar."

And as he spoke they came suddenly in sight of Mr. Beresford approaching them from the lawn, accompanied by two small maidens, the little damsels Maude and Violet, who held a hand of him on either side, and made his tall figure look the taller by comparison.

"I am glad you have found your way back again, Mr. Helstone. We were just talking of you," he said, speaking aloud in his full voice while he was still a dozen paces off. "And you have brought your

friend along with you, which makes you doubly welcome. Good evening to you both. How goes the fishing, sir? I'd like to have taken a look at you this morning, but it would have been against my conscience. I never fish on Fridays. Not for the reason you are thinking, sir," and the Vicar turned his quick eye suddenly on Mr. Dallas, "but because of my sermon. I make a rule to write my sermon on Friday always."

"And a very excellent rule it is, I have no doubt," replied Mr. Dallas,—“except for its result in keeping you from another occupation that seems rather peculiarly suited to the day—I mean, from a religious point of view.”

"Ah, you're a wag, sir, are you?" said the Vicar. And then he looked the young man over with a smile about the corners of his handsome mouth. "You see a

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connection between fishing and fasting, do you? Unfortunately though, I *don't* fast."

"But perhaps that is an omission that may be mended?" suggested Mr. Dallas pleasantly.

"When it is, then I'll write my sermons on Thursdays," replied Mr. Beresford with a laugh.

They went forward to the lawn, and then there were other greetings to be made. Mrs. Beresford, seated on a garden-bench, and knitting stockings, gave her hand to the young men and briefly bade them welcome; pretty Lilian, in a white gown, also offered her hand to Godfrey, and smiled upon his friend, and Edith came up with a frank smile and an immediate address.

"Now, you will play to-night, won't you?" she said to Mr. Helstone. "I want you to help me to beat Lilian, you know."

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Will you be on my side?—and Lilian and Mr. Dallas can go together.”

“Ah, we shall never have a chance against those two,” replied Godfrey.

But nevertheless he submitted to his fate, and they were soon busy with their game. To tell the truth, he would rather have played it with Joanne than Edith, but Joanne, as it happened, was as yet not to be seen.

“Is your other sister not at home to-night?” he asked of Edith after some little time had passed; but Edith was engrossed with what she was about, and did not answer his question.

“Well, I must do my best to beat Miss Lilian,” said Godfrey to himself.

But, though he did his best, Lilian and her partner were both excellent players, and he did not beat her.

"Oh dear, it was all my fault," exclaimed Edith presently, when they were defeated, and though Godfrey replied civilly, "Not at all," yet he knew, at the same time, that she said the truth. The girl had no method in her play; she was not a partner to do credit to anybody. "I'd wager Joanne would have done better," Godfrey thought.

But what had become of Joanne? Mr. Dallas was evidently getting on admirably with Miss Beresford. Her face was wreathed in smiles; her eyes as they talked together were alternately drooped and lifted to his face; he was flirting with her in the easiest and pleasantest way, and, after his usual fashion, enjoying himself—Godfrey rather enviously thought. For somehow, though Edith was bright and conversable enough, Godfrey considered that his own

position, with no one but her for his companion, might very undoubtedly be improved.

“What a fellow he is for getting on with women!” the young man ejaculated to himself. “And he never seems to take any trouble about it either. He has only to come amongst them, and they cluster about him like bees round a ripe peach. He will have them all in a circle presently,” said Godfrey with rather a sensation of disgust, as at this moment even Edith turned her back upon him, and went to join her elder sister, leaving him to amuse himself without her as he chose.

He looked about him. The Vicar had gone indoors; Mrs. Beresford was still knitting steadily; on one corner of the lawn three of the boys were playing leap-frog. Godfrey turned away, and began to stroll

along one of the walks; and then suddenly his eye fell on some one coming up the little avenue, and, with a feeling of unquestionable pleasure, he perceived that it was Joanne. Quickening his steps he went straight to meet her. It seemed to him instinctively as though she were the special morsel of the household pertaining to himself. He greeted her almost with warmth.

"I couldn't think where you were," he exclaimed.

"Why, was it so unlikely that I should be out?" she answered with a look of amusement. "Oh, I am often out. I have been down just now with my cousins."

"With your cousins?" echoed Godfrey. ("By Jove, are there still more of them!" was the involuntary thought that flashed across him.) "Have you cousins here,—in the village?"

"Oh yes, six of them," replied Joanne, laughing.

"God bless me!" said Godfrey. "And are they Beresfords too?"

"Yes, they are all Beresfords. They are the children of papa's brother," said Joanne.

"He died a few years ago, and then Mrs. Beresford came here that she might be near us."

"That was natural, certainly," said Godfrey. "But it rather amuses one to find so many of you all together. I suppose now you are sometimes—the whole seventeen of you—here on the lawn together?"

"Well, sometimes," replied Joanne, "but it doesn't happen very often. Two of my cousins are not living here. They only come down in holiday time. They live in London."

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"What, are they at school?" asked Godfrey.

"No, no," said Joanne, "they are grown up. One is twenty-six; he is an architect; and the other is going to be a doctor."

"Oh, indeed," said Godfrey. He thought it was just as well that they lived in London.

"The other four are girls," said Joanne. "They are very nice. I should like you to see them."

"I have no doubt I should like it too," replied Mr. Helstone.

"One of them is very pretty," said Joanne. "Some people say, almost as pretty as Lilian. But I hardly think that, for my own part."

"You admire your sister very much then?" inquired Godfrey, with rather an impulse of curiosity.

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"Admire Lilian?" exclaimed Joanne. She lifted up her bright eyes with a surprised look to her companion. "I think everybody admires her," she said. And then her expression asked so clearly, "Do not you?" that Godfrey answered the unspoken question with a laugh.

"Oh, *I* do, of course," he said. "I think she is beautiful."

"She is engaged to be married," said Joanne quietly.

"Oh—indeed!" exclaimed Godfrey. He hardly knew why, but this information took him entirely by surprise.

"It is no secret," said Joanne, "or else of course I should not tell you. She has been engaged since Christmas. I think it is always better that people should know these things."

"No doubt," answered Godfrey. "Some-

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how it had never occurred to me that there was anything of that sort, though I am sure I might well have guessed it—for, so handsome as she is—”

“Yes, I think you might have suspected it,” Joanne answered frankly. And then she said suddenly, “He is a Mr. Francis. She met him last year in London. He fell in love with her there; and then he came in the winter and asked her. He is rather nice, I think. They are to be married early in the winter.”

“And will they live in London?” Godfrey asked. “Has Mr. Francis any profession?”

“Well, he has gone to the bar, but his father is just dead, and I believe he will not need to work now. Papa thinks it rather a pity,” Joanne added after a moment’s silence. “He always thinks it

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is a misfortune for a young man at the beginning to have enough to live upon."

"And he is, I have no doubt, quite right," replied Godfrey, with much gravity.

They had been walking slowly forward, and they joined the others after this. The Vicar's portly figure was now added to the group upon the lawn, and he and Mr. Dallas were fencing at one another with good-humoured banter, Mr. Beresford standing with his legs planted wide apart, and his arms folded behind his back.

"Yes, I tell you, you take a vast deal too much upon yourselves, you youngsters," he was saying in his sonorous voice as the other two drew near. "You think you are here to do all the work of the world. My dear sir, before your hands leave their mark on the plough your heads will need to get

something more into them than the learning of the schools."

"We shall have to gain wisdom by experience, you mean? Oh yes," said Mr. Dallas carelessly, "that used to be the theory, but it's all exploded now."

"Ah! that's exploded, is it? Then how do you mean to get your wisdom?" asked the Vicar.

"I believe," said Mr. Dallas, "in these days wisdom is a thing that springs out of a young man full grown, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter."

"And when does this take place?—at one-and-twenty?" inquired the Vicar.

"Well, as to that, there is a slight diversity of opinion. For my own part," said Mr. Dallas, modestly, "I should rather assign four or five-and-twenty as the most likely age."

“Exactly: so I should suppose,” said the Vicar drily. “About your own time of life, in fact?”

“Oh,” exclaimed Mr. Dallas pleasantly, “that it happens to be mine is the merest accident. It does not do, you see, to make these questions personal.”

“Very true,” replied the Vicar, “or else I might say that to me now there seems a ripe mellowness in the wisdom of three or four-and-fifty—”

“In exceptional cases, no doubt,” returned Mr. Dallas with a bow. “But, as a general rule, at three or four-and-fifty, if you will allow me to say so, Mr. Beresford, a man is beginning to be formalized—he has got into a groove—he has adopted prejudices—his weaknesses have become confirmed.”

“Ah, there you have me, I am afraid!” said the Vicar.

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He had been fronting his opponent hitherto with merely a look of good-natured amusement in his face, but something in Mr. Dallas's last retort gave him a sudden twinge, and made the handsome mobile lips quiver for a moment. In the next he turned away with a laugh.

"Come, sir," he said to Godfrey, "take your friend off. He is telling home truths to an old man."

"I beg to say," replied Mr. Dallas courteously, "that I was quite unconscious there was any old man here."

They began to saunter round the garden after this, in one general group at first; but the group split presently, and Godfrey for a little while found himself by Lilian's side, while Joanne and her father and Jack Dallas walked on in front.

"And so the girl is engaged!" Godfrey

ejaculated to himself, and he glanced at her hand. Yes ; there was the orthodox engagement ring upon her finger. " I wonder which she cares for most — the man or the diamonds ? " he thought. Somehow he could not believe that the man counted with her for very much.

" This time last year you were in London, were you not ? Did you like it ? " he abruptly asked.

" Oh, immensely ! " replied Lilian with ardour. " Oh dear, yes, it was delightful."

" You went about a great deal, I suppose ? "

" I think we went everywhere," she exclaimed. " To parties, and theatres, and operas, and concerts, and exhibitions ; I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

" You have some cousins in London, I think ? " Godfrey remarked.

"Oh yes; we have some cousins." Lilian's tone became suddenly indifferent. "But I didn't see much of them."

"They were busy men, I suppose?" said Godfrey. "They wouldn't have time to go with you to exhibitions and concerts?"

"Oh, of course not. I never thought of depending on *them*," replied Lilian with some emphasis. "I think on the whole cousins are rather embarrassing," she added after a moment. "I mean, you are supposed always to be intimate with them, and sometimes, you know, it—*isn't* convenient."

"So I can imagine," said Godfrey laughing. "But I am sorry for the young Mr. Beresfords."

"Oh, there isn't much need for that," replied Lilian carelessly, "—for, you know, it isn't *me*."

"It isn't you?" repeated Godfrey, with

a little hesitation. He did not understand her speech.

“No,” exclaimed Lilian frankly, “it’s Joanne.”

And then, when the young man made no answer, for, to tell the truth, he felt curiously taken aback by this information, and was even conscious that it had brought the colour into his face—

“I always think it’s a pity between cousins—don’t you?” she said.

“Your sister was telling me about her cousins in London a little while ago,” said Godfrey, after his two or three moments of silence; “but I had no idea from how she spoke that there was any—that she and either of them were thinking—”

“Oh, I don’t mean that *she* is thinking of it,” interrupted Lilian eagerly. “Oh no, I am thankful to say she isn’t. At

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least, she can't help *thinking* about it, you know, because he bothers her so; but I don't believe she will ever have him. Papa wouldn't let her, for one thing, if he could help it."

"A persistent lover may achieve a good deal, however, in spite of difficulties," replied Godfrey.

"Yes, he may. Oh dear yes, of course I know that," said Lilian. "But I don't much think that Hugh will achieve anything. Poor Hugh! I am afraid," said the girl suddenly, with rather late repentance, "that I oughtn't to have told you about him; but, you see, I suspected you were thinking it was me,—and that was such a complete mistake."

"No; I didn't think it was you," said Godfrey. "I suppose in that direction I had had my suspicions lulled. I don't

know," he added with a little hesitation, "whether you will allow me to congratulate you?"

Lilian blushed very becomingly, and looked very conscious, but her expression denoted also perfect willingness to be congratulated.

"Oh, I am sure—oh yes, of course—you see everybody knows; and people are all so kind," she murmured rather incoherently.

"I hope you will be very happy," he said, cordially. "Mr. Francis, I think, lives in London?"

"Yes; he lives in London at present; but I am not sure yet—in fact, we are just making up our minds—there are so many things to be considered. I wonder now what *you* would say?" exclaimed the girl abruptly; and then in the frankest way she proceeded to lay their various schemes

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before him, while Godfrey, with not a little amusement, listened, till at last both her talk and their slow stroll round the garden were brought to an end together by the other walkers meeting them, and arresting their steps.

“ Well, young people, what do you say to coming in ? ” asked the Vicar. “ I think, for my own part, the evening is getting somewhat damp.”

They found the lamps alight in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Beresford sitting by one of them with her work.

“ Ah, I thought it was time you came indoors,” she said. “ You are all so fond of catching rheumatism.”

“ So they are,” replied the Vicar. “ But you and I know that, and the wise young folk don’t; and there’s no way of teaching them that I can see; for you can’t put

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more into a filled dish, and they all (as they have just been telling me) think they are as full of wisdom already as an egg is full of meat. Come and give us a tune, Edith. I don't know whether you young men are musical. Perhaps one or other of you can trill out a ditty for us?"

"Dallas can," said Godfrey. "He does all these things."

"But I hope Miss Beresford will sing something first," said Jack.

"If you mean me, I only play," explained Edith, from the music-stool. "It is Joanne who sings. *I* can't sing a bit."

But she began to play some quaint old airs, and she played them rather prettily, with a light touch, and a good deal of expression. Mr. Dallas went to the piano and stood beside her.

"I think these are charming," he told her.

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“Yes; they are nice old things. Papa digs them up for us,” she said. “He is very fond of them. He used to sing himself, once; but he makes Joanne do it instead of him now. I think it is a pity he won’t sing still, for he has such a fine voice.”

“Ah yes, I used to sing; but I found it was one of the things in me that tried the weaker brethren’s faith,” struck in the Vicar, overhearing what his daughter said. “They thought a parson should only sing psalms. So now I only do sing psalms. You will hear me at church on Sunday—if you come—piping like a bullfinch.”

“I wish you would pipe for us now, in anticipation of Sunday?” suggested Mr. Dallas; but the Vicar shook his head and laughed.

“No, no,” he said; “I’ve given all that up. My mantle has fallen upon

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Joanne. Go and sing something to us, my lass."

And then Joanne took her sister's seat, and struck a chord or two, and sang.

It was one of the freshest young voices, Godfrey thought, that he had ever heard—sweet and flexible and musical as a bird's. She sang a wild, pathetic Swedish song, with a spontaneity and naturalness, and a curious grace, that took the young man fairly by surprise.

He went up to her side when she had ended, and told her it was beautiful.

"A Swedish song, is it?" he said. "Do other people never sing Swedish songs? This seems to me perfectly delightful."

"So it is," echoed Jack. "But then—I if Miss Beresford will allow me to say so—I think the main part of the charm of it depends upon the singer."

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"Thank you," said Joanne, with a smile. "But indeed," she added quickly, "it is so easy to sing simple songs like these."

"I can believe that *you* find it easy," exclaimed Godfrey; "for, upon my word, you seem to me to sing them as if singing were your natural language."

Mr. Helstone did not often pay compliments; but perhaps from that very cause when he did utter one it told with more effect; and this exclamation, which was indeed delivered very fervently, brought a little warmth of colour to Joanne's face. But whether she was pleased by his admiration, or whether she thought the expression of it uncalled for, she left him to decide for himself, for she made no reply.

"Do sing again," Mr. Dallas asked; and then she sang again—a little rippling melody, with a refrain at the end of each

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verse that was like a cry of joy; and Godfrey, listening, thought all at once of Margaret Egerton's singing in the drawing-room at the Dene, and felt as if the force of contrast could not go much farther.

"Why, she sings as not one woman does in five hundred," said Mr. Dallas, enthusiastically, an hour afterwards, as the two friends were walking home. "I don't mean that there is anything remarkable in her execution, of course. I suppose she never had a regular lesson in her life; but, by Jove, the spirit and fire that she puts into it all, and the pathos too, are astonishing. I declare when she sang the refrain of that second song I could hardly stand still on my feet."

"Yes; it was wonderful," said Godfrey.

"I should like to hear the old parson at it too," exclaimed Jack. "With that grand face and that grand voice of his he would

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make your heart-strings thrill, I fancy. An odd family altogether—*very* odd; but they're interesting—no doubt of that. And, upon my word, the eldest girl is a beauty!"

"She is engaged to be married," said Godfrey.

"Is she? I'm not surprised," said his friend. "And it's all the better for us, for she will be the pleasanter to flirt with. I always like to flirt with engaged girls. It makes you comfortable, for you know they have no sinister designs upon you."

"Only there is the objection that it may be a little dangerous at times," said Godfrey—"unless you flirt strictly in moderation."

"Oh, but I always flirt in moderation," answered Mr. Dallas lightly.

He began to whistle a snatch or two of one of the songs that Joanne had sung as they walked along the silent road under the

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stars. Godfrey was thinking of Joanne too.

"She has got most of the brains of the lot, I should say," Mr. Dallas remarked abruptly just before they reached their inn.

"She? Who?" inquired Godfrey, for they had been silent for the last few minutes; and then Jack laughed.

"Why, you don't think that I mean Miss Lilian, do you?" he said.





CHAPTER VI.

INTIMACIES spring up quickly in country places; and, with a rapidity that rather amused them, the two young men found themselves in a few days becoming wonderfully intimate with the Vicar's family. Jack Dallas, as I have already said, was a man who quickly made himself at home wherever he went; he was so pleasant and unobtrusive and ready in his easy way to fall in with other people's occupations and accommodate himself to other people's ways, that those who were brought much in contact with him rarely failed to find themselves treating him as a friend before they

would well have ceased to regard another man as a stranger ; and, though Godfrey was less pliant than his companion and more reserved, yet perhaps the ready welcome that was so frequently accorded to the one for his frank manner was almost as often given to the other for his handsome looks.

“ We can never start fair, for when we enter a room together all the women’s eyes light upon you like flies upon a honey-pot,” Mr. Dallas said one day to his friend, “ and it sets a man at a terrible disadvantage. If it were not that I’ve got a little more brass than you, and am rather more supple in the backbone, I’d be tempted to propose that we should part company.”

“ I don’t know what you mean by women’s eyes lighting on me. I’m hanged if I want their eyes to light on me,”

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Godfrey replied, rather hotly, to this speech. "You have the best of it, I think,—as you know well enough."

"Well, I'm not quarrelling with my bread and butter," replied Mr. Dallas placidly. "Each man has his own gifts."

"And you have a tolerably keen recognition of the value of yours, so if I were you I'd shut up," returned Godfrey curtly; upon which the other laughed. Perhaps, as Mr. Helstone had said, he was very comfortably aware that for the most part the playing of second fiddle was not very likely to be his *rôle* in life.

And, in fact, at this special time it was Mr. Dallas, and not Godfrey, who was fast becoming the most popular of the two young men at the vicarage. He made himself so pleasant to the whole family that they could not but like him in return. He

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fitted himself to Mr. Beresford's humour, and gave him back banter for banter, and jest for jest; he flirted in the airiest way with Lilian, and played with the boys, and petted the little girls, and talked nonsense or sense, as they pleased, to Edith and Joanne, and sat by Mrs. Beresford's side, with an almost filial air of devotion, threading her needle for her when she worked, and winding the skeins of wool for her knitting, till even that usually severe woman owned her heart touched.

"He is certainly a remarkably pleasant young man," she allowed to the Vicar before she had known him for a week, and the Vicar gave a hearty assent.

"He's a fine fellow—a very fine fellow. I don't know when I've liked a lad so much," he said.

Both the young men had had a specially

pleasant day on the first Sunday that they spent at Brentwood.

“Will you come up and dine with us?” the Vicar had asked them the day before. “We dine early, you know; you will have to eat your mutton at one o’clock; but if you think you can do that we shall be delighted to see you.”

“I can eat mutton at any hour,” Mr. Dallas replied pleasantly to this address. “I never find that it comes amiss.”

So it was understood that the invitation was accepted, and at eleven o’clock the next morning the friends betook themselves to church, intending to join the Vicar’s family there, and remain for the rest of the day with them.

The church was a picturesque old building, grey, and a little grim, with a tall line of elms on one side, bounding its

churchyard. Within were a few curious monuments, and an old oak roof, and certain other vestiges of antiquity, of all of which the Vicar, they soon perceived, was very proud, and for which he claimed their notice and commendation when the service was at an end ; but, to tell the truth, both Jack and Godfrey thought that the edifice wore, on the whole, a somewhat bare and dreary appearance.

“Do you know, if I were you, I think I would dress it up a little?” Jack ventured to say to Edith. “It’s very—interesting as it is, of course, but it must look pretty gloomy, I should fancy, on a winter’s day.”

“Yes,” answered Edith laughing, “on a grey, shivering winter morning, when there is hardly light enough for you to read your prayer-book by—ah, you would call it gloomy indeed if you saw it then ! But

it's four hundred years old, you know, and whenever we remember that blessed fact we are always expected to be proud and thankful."

The Vicar had preached a sturdy sermon to them, on the practical text: "Gather up the fragments." "An admirable sermon," as Mr. Dallas boldly told him afterwards, "and specially applicable to Helstone and me."

"And therefore, perhaps, you think I preached it *at* you?" retorted Mr. Beresford, with a twinkle in his eye. "But I did not, sir; though, if you find the cap fit, so much the better."

"There is no doubt the cap fits," replied Jack. "With every sentence you uttered Helstone and I blushed more and more, until we couldn't look at one another."

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"Speak for yourself, sir! I have a notion that *you* had a good deal more cause to blush than Mr. Helstone," returned the Vicar laughing.

It had been a very simply conducted service, for Mr. Beresford was not the sort of man to trouble himself about innovations, and what had been done in his church a generation ago seemed to him fitting enough to be done still. He had read the prayers, as he himself might have said, "decently and in order," and an old-fashioned clerk had led the responses and given out the psalms. But when the singing began, the Vicar's fine sonorous voice had made itself felt with effect. He had sung and Joanne sang, and Godfrey, sitting in one of the Vicarage pews, had thought such music was well worth listening to. The blending of the two voices

had given him an almost curious sense of pleasure.

They walked across the churchyard to the Vicarage in a straggling party. Some of the children had gone on before, and Mr. Beresford followed in the rear.

"I've got to give them another sermon, you know, at three o'clock," he told Godfrey; "but I don't ask you to come to it," he added with a laugh, "for you will do pretty well if you digest the one you have heard already."

"Are you afraid of too much strong meat not being good for babes?" Godfrey answered, laughing too; and then he did not say whether he would return to church or not, but when after dinner he found that Edith and Joanne were both going back he was content enough to accompany them.

Mr. Dallas, however, for himself, decided differently.

"I am rather disposed to take a walk and meditate," he said. "You see, I am always an advocate for moderation in all things; and one sermon, as Mr. Beresford so justly remarked, well digested—"

"Is better than a stalled ox," interrupted Edith, "and dyspepsia therewith."

And then they parted; but when the church-goers came back they did *not* find Mr. Dallas meditating.

Instead of that he had got a group of the youngest children round him on the lawn, and was engaged with them there in most un-Sabbatical romps. Mrs. Beresford heard their shrill shouts of delighted laughter before she had more than half-crossed the churchyard, and there was haste in that excellent woman's step and reproof in her

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eye as she unfastened the gate, and, in advance of all the rest, came suddenly on the culprits.

“My dear Mr. Dallas!” she exclaimed in a voice that ought to have awed the irreverent young man, and brought him at once to a sense of his fault; “do you remember—surely you cannot—that this is Sunday, and that the congregation is coming out of church?”

“But *we* haven’t been to church,” answered Jack airily, and he paused and looked at her with the most innocent face. “What ought we to do—in the circumstances?” he said.

“Not certainly what you *are* doing,” replied Mrs. Beresford severely. And then she went forward, and took one of her sons by the shoulder: “Harry, do you know your collect?” she said.

“Yes,—I’ll bear testimony to that,” cried Jack interposing, “for I’ve heard him say it, and barring a word or two, which are immaterial—”

“Mr. Dallas, allow me!” said Mrs. Beresford with decision. “Harry, you will go indoors instantly, and wash your hands and brush your hair, and read over your collect again until I call you. Violet, and Maude, and Tom, you will all at once go indoors. Mr. Dallas—” and then, as the children filed off, she turned again to the young man—“I am surprised at you! If you had given the matter a moment’s thought, you would have perceived that such riotous playing as this that you have been encouraging is most unbecoming on a Sunday afternoon, in a clergyman’s garden.”

“Dear me, I suppose it is,” exclaimed Jack penitently. “I did encourage it—

there's not a doubt of that, but I forgot all about the congregation. If there is anything I can do—even to standing in a white sheet and making a public confession—”

There was a little ripple of laughter; some of the elder girls had come up, and it was impossible to be serious any longer. But Mrs. Beresford, though she could not retain her severe attitude, still shook her head with a final effort at rebuke.

“I shall be afraid, you see, to leave you with these children again on any other Sunday,” she said.

“My dear Mrs. Beresford,” cried Jack, “you may trust me for the future as though I were an archbishop.” And he looked so pleasantly confident, and so certain of being taken at his word, that even Mrs. Beresford thought it best to say no more.

“I think you are very absurd,” she only

answered ; and then she laughed too, and the young sinner knew that he had made his peace.

They had a delightful evening after this. The Vicar came amongst them in half an hour, looking like a man who had thrown a weight off his back.

“No, I’m not fond of preaching sermons,” he confessed to them, in answer to something that Jack said. “To tell the truth, I always feel a certain sense of shame in the business. I sometimes think if we could take it in rotation—I and my flock—and preach in turns to one another, it might make a better thing of it ; for, you see, we don’t live up to our sermons—that’s the worst,” he exclaimed with a sudden change in his voice as of some note gone out of tune. “We get up into our pulpits and we preach to men what most of us

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imperfectly practise ; and either we deceive the people who are simple, and make them believe what fine fellows we are, or we give a handle to the people who are shrewd, to say what humbugs we are ; and, either way, it's bad enough—both for our own soul's welfare or God's glory. There are plenty of men amongst us, I know, who are not as we are—as we are, I mean, who are the Laodiceans,” said Mr. Beresford, flinging the term at himself with a sudden fine scorn, “ but I am not talking of them ; they are our martyrs and heroes : I am speaking of the common herd of us—the men no better than their fellows, who have gone into the Church simply because the Church has offered them a living, and not because the love of God was burning in their hearts, and driving them into the streets, and alleys, and dark places, to

speak out the truth that was in them. There are plenty such—plenty: I wish I were one of them,” the Vicar ended, suddenly and sharply.

It was not a speech that either Godfrey or Jack could answer, and they held their tongues when Mr. Beresford had made it, though they spoke of it to one another afterwards.

“A grand old Pagan sort of fellow!” Jack said. “I should have liked to clap him on the back, and cry, ‘Cheer up, old boy!’ only I didn’t quite know how he would have taken it.”

And Godfrey said more gravely—“What a pity he didn’t choose another walk for himself, for evidently he was never meant for the one he has got into. He would have made a fine soldier, if he had taken to that line of life, and have got his

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conscience satisfied so, which it will never be now, I am afraid."

"Oh well, I don't know that. I doubt if, on the whole, his conscience troubles him much," answered Jack with a laugh.

And perhaps Mr. Dallas was right, for in spite of the clear-sightedness that made the Vicar so well aware of his spiritual shortcomings he seemed in truth a happy man. He was probably of too genial and easy a temperament to disquiet himself about any evil that it was beyond his power to remedy, and perhaps he had faced the fact so long ago that he was something of a failure, that it had lost a good deal for him of its natural sting.

At any rate, on this Sunday he got rid of his momentary depression with great celerity. The fit was hardly on him for five minutes, and long before the young

men had forgotten his speech the Vicar was himself again, with a hearty word for every one, and a hearty laugh for every joke. Only Godfrey noticed, and wondered whether it happened by chance or not, that, as they all afterwards strolled together up and down the lawn, Joanne walked beside her father, and kept her hand for a long time within his arm.

There was no evening service—"Why, you don't think I preach to them *three* times, do you?" Mr. Beresford answered in an amazed tone to a question on the subject that Jack put)—so, when tea had been taken, they were all free to do as they liked, and half-a-dozen of them, the Vicar, with his three eldest daughters, and Godfrey and Jack, all strolled together into the Vicar's hay-field, and sat down there on the heaps of hay, and talked till the sun

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went down. It was a field that sloped down to the river; they could see the sparkling water, and the meadows beyond, golden in the evening sunshine, and the pine trees with their purple stems.

The Vicar was full of geniality, and of pleasant talk about a hundred things. Jack happened to ask him some question about his early days, and as he answered it his answer awakened other memories, and he lay back on the new-made hay, with his arms folded beneath his head, and his eyes shaded by his wide-awake, telling them one story after another of his college days. The man was so social and human and hearty that his stories kept them listening and interested for a long time. The voices of the others came in often with laughter, and with an occasional remark, but it was the Vicar almost

exclusively who talked, filling the air round him with his mellow tones.

After more than an hour Lilian was the first to rise, and then when Lilian rose Jack too got on his feet. She thought it was a pity not to have a walk, she said. So they all roused themselves, and went down to the river, and walked along its banks.

Joanne called Godfrey's attention presently to a certain group of poplars, and said she had been trying to make a sketch of them, "just of those three trees, and a bit of the water, and the marsh mallows on the bank," she said. "I thought it might turn out prettily,—but it is so hard to do even a little thing well."

"It is hard to do anything well," answered Godfrey profoundly. "But I should like to see your sketches some day. It strikes me—only I am no judge, I know—

that this is a very paintable sort of place,—that is, in the modern sense, of course. It's odd, is it not, that paintableness seems to be considered quite another thing now from what it was even fifty years ago? People would not have thought much of this sort of scene for a picture then."

"No; they would hardly have given a glance at it, I suppose," she said. "Changes like that are so strange," she added rather sadly after a moment. "They make one feel sometimes as if there were no way of getting at the truth of things—I mean, almost as if there *were* no real truth or beauty, but only fashion."

"Well, as for that, art is only in the condition of everything else. We have no fixed standing ground anywhere," said Godfrey.

"No," answered Joanne gravely, and

then she turned away, and Mr. Helstone, who was fond of a discussion, and would have liked well enough to have engaged in this one, had to shut his mouth.

“You were afraid that I was going to shock you with some tremendous sceptical utterances that first Sunday night,” he told her once afterwards, laughing, when they had become more intimate. “I saw you shudder, and put on a rigid face, as you might have done if you had seen the devil at your elbow. But I was a very harmless devil in reality. You might have let me go on in perfect safety.”

“I was not afraid of letting you go on. It was only—” said Joanne hesitating a moment, “that there were too many of us there. If only you and I and my father had been together I would not have thought of stopping you.”

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At the time, however, she did not know him well enough to tell him this, and so she turned away and addressed herself to some one else, and a minute afterwards Lilian said something to him, and he walked on by her side.

Lilian was not a young lady who troubled herself much about abstract truths, or indeed about difficult questions of any kind. She began to talk to Godfrey very artlessly, after her usual fashion, and he put Joanne out of his mind, and answered her in her own strain. She was one of those girls who are so pretty that whether they are wise or foolish no man can regard them quite with indifference.

“We must go in to prayers,” said the Vicar, when the clock had struck nine. “We say our prayers early, young gentlemen, on a Sunday evening.”

So they all went in, and sat in the drawing-room and listened while the Vicar, amidst his assembled family, read his brief evening service. It was a ceremony of which neither Godfrey nor Jack had seen anything hitherto.

“Do you think it takes place on ordinary nights at all?” Mr. Dallas speculated afterwards with his friend as they walked home; but Godfrey only shook his head.

“He fired it off at us,” said Jack, “with very little loss of time. I looked at the clock over the mantel-piece, and it was all at an end in seven minutes. What an age of progress it is!”

“And with what feelings the ghosts of our ancestors must look at us!” said Godfrey.

There was supper after prayers, and the

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Vicar as he sat over his glass of grog was at his best and heartiest.

“I must have another morning with you, boys,” he told his guests before they parted. “I have got work to do to-morrow, and a day of parish visiting on Tuesday: but on Wednesday, if that should chance to suit you—?”

“We will make an engagement of it at once,” said Jack.

“Come, then, and we’ll have a grand day!” cried Mr. Beresford. “We’ll catch our fish, and you shall come back with me and eat them.”

“I am afraid that will be rather too hard on Mrs. Beresford?” suggested Godfrey, hesitating a little; but Jack only looked at his hostess with one of his brightest looks of confidence, and—

“Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Beresford are one,”

he said in a tone that sent a laugh round the table, and brought a smile even to the lady's lips.

"I am not so sure of that sometimes, Mr. Dallas," she said. "But at least, as far as this point is concerned—" And then she seconded the invitation very cordially.

"She's not a bad old girl when you know how to get round her," Mr. Dallas remarked irreverently to his friend afterwards. "The shell is a little hard to crack, but there is a kernel inside for them who can crack it dexterously. For my part I like her."

"And you believe that she likes you," answered Godfrey.

"Well, I believe that a man is the better for carrying these sort of faiths about with him," replied Mr. Dallas frankly. "Why

shouldn't she like me? I take a good deal of trouble to make her."

"Oh, you deserve your success, I don't dispute," said Godfrey. "You have always been all things to all men."

"I don't know about all *men*," replied Jack, a little dubiously; "but all things to all *women*, to the best of my powers, I do think I may say I try to be."

"And in the end you are a great humbug," said Godfrey.

"Well—and in one sort or another—are we not all humbugs?" returned Jack in his pleasantest way.

It was ten o'clock when they walked home, and as they went they agreed that the day had been a very pleasant one.

"Upon my word I begin to think," said Mr. Dallas, "that we have fallen on our feet. It's odd that what one would have

fled from if anybody had told one of it beforehand—this prodigious family, I mean—should really turn out to be one of the greatest attractions of the place. I hardly know which of the girls I shall fall in love with yet.”

“Is it necessary,” inquired Godfrey, “to fall in love with any of them?”

“Oh, that is of course a matter of opinion,” answered Jack lightly. “For my own part I am inclined to do it. But then of course I shall do it with discretion. So far, I should say, I am rather disposed to make up to Joanne.”

“Indeed?” said Godfrey, a little curtly.

“Yes. There’s a bright *espiègle* look about her,” Mr. Dallas went on, “that I like amazingly. She is shy too, and a certain sort of shyness always gives charm to a girl. She doesn’t bestow her smiles

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on you with the radiant readiness of Miss Lilian; nor, like Miss Edith, cap your smart sayings with would-be smart sayings of her own. That Miss Edith is a little too frank and unimpressible for me. She talks to you as if she thought you were a boy, or another woman. I'm not taken by that sort of thing."

"Well, she doesn't intend you to be taken by it, I should say," replied Godfrey; "I think she is very unaffected and nice—in her way."

"Oh, I have no doubt she is. I only say it is not a way that appeals to me much. I like both the other girls better. And, I'll tell you what,—I like that little person Violet. I believe when she is grown up she will beat Lilian. I could almost have it in my heart to ask her to wait for the next eight or ten years for me; only, if I

did, the chances are that I should never come back again, and so the proceeding might have consequences that would possibly be a little annoying to her. No," said Jack thoughtfully, "on the whole I think I had better keep to Joanne."

"That is, if she will allow you,—perhaps a more modest man would add," said Godfrey with a little irritation.

"Oh, I never pretend to be modest," answered Mr. Dallas, with perfect frankness.





CHAPTER VII.

MR. HELSTONE and Mr. Dallas were walking down the village street one afternoon soon after this, when they came on Joanne and Lilian standing talking to some other girls. The young men would have passed by with a bow, but Joanne put out her hand, and then, when they had exchanged greetings, introduced her companions.

They were the other Beresfords,—two of the cousins of whom she had already spoken to Godfrey. They all stood together for five minutes ; then Godfrey and Jack left them again, and went their own way.

“Are there many more of them, do you think?” said Mr. Dallas in a subdued voice, as soon as they were out of hearing. “I never knew such a family in my life! A pair of not ill-looking girls, too, these new ones.”

“Oh, they seem to be all rather nice-looking, more or less,—the whole clan of them,” replied Godfrey. “One of these other Beresfords is counted very handsome, Miss Joanne told me once.”

“What, another one besides those behind us? Oh, by Jupiter, what a tribe!” cried Jack with a face of dismay.

But the next day Godfrey laughed to himself, for, chancing to be standing at one of the windows of the inn, he saw his friend coming down the street in company with evidently the whole four Miss Beresfords of the village, talking to them, and sauntering

on beside them, apparently on the pleasantest terms with the entire quartette. He came in presently, very ready himself to laugh at his proceedings.

“There’s nothing like taking matters into one’s own hands,” he exclaimed. “I met those two girls that we saw yesterday, and I could tell by their faces that they wanted to be spoken to, so I spoke to them (poor souls, they blushed as I stopped them; they don’t see a young man every day), and then their sisters came up, with curiosity in their blue eyes, and of course I got myself introduced to them too; and then, as they didn’t seem to know how to move on, I turned and moved on with them, and I’ve been escorting them home to their garden-gate. Upon my word, it’s great fun!” cried Jack, with a face full of amusement. “All the four dear souls are talking of me

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together, I have no doubt, at this very moment."

"They live with a widowed mother," said Godfrey. "I dare say she was looking at you in horror over the window-blind, and she is probably lecturing her daughters on their conduct now. If you go on like this, Jack, you will get us a bad character in the place."

"Oh, these four little girls won't give me a bad character," exclaimed Jack with happy confidence. "Very nice girls, I call them all, and one of them, as you were saying yesterday, uncommonly pretty. Hardly up to Miss Lilian, perhaps, but *very* good-looking undoubtedly. I think we ought to have them up at the Vicarage."

"Do you propose to invite them there?" inquired Godfrey.

"Well, I said something to them about

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it," replied Jack, "and my remarks were received with the utmost graciousness. I suggested that they should come up and play croquet with us. Oh, I'll manage it easily! They have a croquet-lawn of their own too, they told me, so I am rather disposed to call on their mother and have a look at it."

"I have no doubt you will call on their mother before many days are past," Godfrey answered laughing.

And he proved perfectly right, for the next day it happened that the Vicar introduced both the young men to his sister-in-law, and Mr. Dallas at once seized the opportunity to make himself so agreeable to Mrs. Arthur Beresford that that lady, before they parted, expressed her hope that she should have the pleasure of seeing him and his friend at her own house.

“Unfortunately,” she said, “my sons are neither of them here at this moment; though I am expecting one of them very soon. But if you could find any amusement in coming to an entirely feminine household—”

“Oh, if we were to come, you see, we should supply the element that was wanting,” exclaimed Jack in the readiest way. “I am sure we shall be very pleased indeed.”

And then he hauled Godfrey up, and Godfrey also received his invitation, and had to make his civil speech.

“She is not so simple a woman as Mrs. Vicar,” said Jack after this, when he and Godfrey had gone their own road. “I should say she was a woman with a good eye for business, and a keen sense of her maternal duties. I don’t think I’m a great catch myself (though, of course, about that,

opinions may differ), but as for you, with your good-looking face, and your broad acres—”

“I think I can take care of my acres,” interrupted Godfrey curtly. Upon which Jack laughed, and began to talk of something else.

They went very shortly and made their call. They found Mrs. Arthur in a small but very daintily-adorned house—a low-roofed cottage, all roses and jasmine on the outside, and filled within with such a crowd of pretty things, that Jack declared afterwards when he was once seated he was afraid to move hand or foot, lest annihilation of some fragile ornament should follow.

Mrs. Beresford and two of her daughters received them. They were the two youngest daughters, and Godfrey, at any rate, who had not quite his friend's gift for drawing

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out young ladies, found them shy. Mrs. Beresford herself, however, was by no means shy, and she took Godfrey in hand presently, and was very gracious to him.

“I am so sorry my other girls are out,” she told him. “They have gone to pay a necessary visit—a visit of condolence”—and then she gave a little sigh. “Such a sad case! A poor young mother, only twenty-three, who has lost her only child. My Clara is very fond of her. I think you have not seen my two eldest daughters yet, Mr. Helstone? No?—so I thought. But you will give me the opportunity of introducing you to them, I hope. Will you and your friend come and take a cup of afternoon tea with us to-morrow? And then, if the day should be fine, and you were disposed for a game of croquet afterwards—”

Of course Godfrey said that he and Mr.

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Dallas would like very much to come. He did not feel very eager to prosecute this new acquaintanceship; but since they had made their call, they could hardly refuse the consequent invitation.

“You have been seeing a good deal of the family at the Vicarage? Yes; and they are all so nice, are they not?” said Mrs. Arthur. “The Vicar is quite a character; and has he not got a fine family? Really it is surprising—so many of them, and all likely to turn out well. I am sure I need not tell you that I am very proud of my nephews and nieces. Don’t you admire Lilian, Mr. Helstone? Is she not a beautiful girl?”

“Yes, she is very handsome,” said Godfrey. “The handsomest, of course, by far, of them all.”

“So I think. Only—poor dear Lilian!—her face is her fortune, I always say—for she

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is not clever. No ; I must allow she is not clever. Nature seems very just sometimes in her division of gifts, does she not ? Here is my eldest niece, you see, has got the beauty, and her sisters have the brains."

"Oh, well, I don't know about that," said Godfrey rather quickly. "I should say that they had all their share of good looks. I think Miss Joanne is very pretty indeed."

"Do you really?" asked Mrs. Arthur, and raised her eyebrows a little. "Well, I don't agree with you. She is admired by some people, I know, but—I don't care for that style of face. Now Edith, I think, is pretty."

"Miss Edith is very nice," said Godfrey. But he smiled as he spoke. "Mrs. Arthur has evidently no love for Joanne. The maternal heart does not forgive her, I suppose, for not returning the devotion of her cub of a son," he thought to himself.

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They sat for half-an-hour, and then made their adieux. There was no chance, it seemed, of the other girls coming in.

“But we shall see you to-morrow?” said Mrs. Beresford, giving them her hand, with one of her most friendly smiles.

And then the young men repeated their promise that they should be seen to-morrow, and took their leave.

They did go back on the following day, and spent a lively enough afternoon. They found a number of other people there; their hostess and her daughters appeared in the daintiest of summer dresses to receive them; it was a complete “at home,” though on a small scale. Evidently Mrs. Arthur’s taste was of a different kind from that which reigned at the Vicarage, and she cared to exercise her hospitality in a different way.

Early in the day, before they had bent

their steps towards Rose Cottage, Godfrey had come across Joanne in the village, and had walked with her down the street.

“We are going to afternoon tea to-day with your aunt,” he had told her; but when he announced this fact, she replied that she was already quite aware of it.

“Have you not learnt yet that everybody knows everything about their neighbours in Brentwood?” she asked him. “My aunt sent a messenger up to the Vicarage last night to spread the news.”

“Dear me, what made her do that?” said Godfrey quickly.

But Joanne did not choose to enlighten him, and went away laughing, and he only got an answer to his question when, a few hours later, he found Lilian and Joanne herself amongst Mrs. Arthur’s guests.

“I think it was very bad of you not to

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tell me that you were coming," he said to her then.

"Why was it bad? You looked so scared when I told you the first part of my aunt's message that I thought I would spare you the rest," Joanne answered, with a gleam in her bright eyes.

How well she looked among the other girls! Godfrey thought; better than any of them, to his mind—with more real charm, that is to say. He had engaged himself to play a game of croquet before he saw her, and he had to go and fulfil his engagement, but as he played he knew that he would a great deal rather be talking to her. The Arthur Beresfords and their friends did not interest him, but the indifference he felt towards them only gave warmth to his feeling for Joanne, and added keenness to his admiration of her.

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He went in search of her as soon as his game was finished. She was not in the garden then, but he found her indoors, talking in the drawing-room to a lady, who, however, to Godfrey's satisfaction, rose as he entered the room, leaving the seat she had occupied vacant—a tempting seat, of which he soon took possession, with unmistakable pleasure.

“I was wondering what had become of you,” he said. “We have finished our game, and now I feel that I have done my duty.”

“And so you have come here to seek an ignoble repose?” she said.

“I have come to seek a *pleasant* repose,” he answered. “It does not seem ignoble to *me* in the very least.” And he leaned back in his easy chair, feeling that his position was highly satisfactory.

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Joanne rather disturbed his placidity, however, by her next words.

"If your game is over, mine, I imagine, must be coming on," she said.

"Oh, you are not going to play, are you?" he exclaimed, starting quickly forward again. "I never thought of that! But I don't believe they are going to do anything just now—I don't indeed; so please sit still till they come for you. Surely you needn't be in any hurry?"

"I don't want to keep them waiting," she answered, "otherwise I am in no hurry at all."

"Then, depend upon it, when they are ready they will come. People always take care of themselves," said Godfrey severely. "I feel as if we had been seeing so little of you—of any of you—lately."

"That is not our fault, I think," said Joanne.

"No; it is only the fault of circumstances. We should have come up to-night if it had not been for this affair."

"Then I think you had better come up to-morrow night," she said.

"May we? We shall be delighted. I have just been playing with your pretty cousin."

"So I saw," said Joanne.

"And she is *very* pretty, certainly."

"I am glad you think so. She is a pleasant girl too."

"I suppose she is. They seem all pleasant. Your aunt is very—ahem!—very kind."

"My aunt is a clever woman—cleverer than any of her daughters." Joanne made this reply very quietly.

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“Or—than her sons?” asked Godfrey.

He gave his companion a rapid glance as he made this inquiry. He was rather curious to see if it brought any look of consciousness to her face, and (not with too much satisfaction) it seemed to him that it did bring a look of consciousness.

“No; not cleverer than her sons,” she answered, after a moment’s hesitation. “I think you would call both her sons clever—in their different ways.”

“She seems to be expecting one of them here before long,” said Godfrey rather stiffly.

“Yes,” replied Joanne. And then there was no doubt that the colour came a little into her cheek. “She is expecting Hugh.”

“Is he the eldest?”

“Yes.”

“The one who is an architect?”

“Yes.”

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"He would need to have some brains if he hopes to get on in his profession," said Godfrey rather curtly.

"Well, I told you he had brains," replied Joanne, with a little asperity.

"And what brings him here at this precise moment?"

"I suppose his holidays bring him here," she said. "He is able to take them at his own time, and he likes the summer weather and the long days, I imagine—not unnaturally."

"As we all do, you mean?" said Godfrey. "Yes; I suppose we all like to get the best things we can for ourselves. We are always in this world treading on one another's toes, and jostling one another's elbows."

"I don't think that is true always," said Joanne quietly.

There was a minute's silence after this.

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Mr. Helstone felt that the surface of his temper had unreasonably got a little ruffled. Joanne was looking as if her thoughts had gone to a distance from him. He glanced at her, rather dissatisfied, and then, all at once, with a sudden but rather hesitating look of inquiry, she raised her eyes to his.

“I wonder, as we are speaking of Hugh, if you would let me ask you something?” she said a little shyly. “I only learnt from Clara just now that Hugh is coming here so soon. If he comes, as they think he will, next week, of course you will see him, and—you would please me very much,” said the girl rather earnestly, “if you would show a little kindness to him. Would you? He does not make friends easily—you will understand why after you have seen him once; and I think if you and Mr. Dallas—”

“Oh certainly; I shall be very happy,”

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said Godfrey; but he felt that, almost against his will, he made his response stiffly, and in a tone of extreme ungraciousness, and he was uncomfortably aware in another moment that Joanne was conscious of this too, for her eyes met his again, with a sudden change in their expression, and the next words she spoke proved that she had distinctly comprehended how she had made a request which he had no mind to grant.

“Very likely it will not be necessary. I did not mean to trouble you,” she said quickly and rather proudly.

“It will be no trouble. Of course, anything I can do—” began Godfrey again, feeling ashamed of himself, and trying to speak with more warmth.

But to this second speech Joanne made no reply, and there was a sudden awkward

silence, which he was racking his brain to think how best to break, when some one came into the room to tell her how the croquet players were calling for her, upon which she at once rose from her seat and crossed the room, without addressing another word to Godfrey, who followed behind her more vexed with himself than he could well have told.

“Hang the fellow!” he ejaculated inwardly, indignantly feeling as if what had happened had been all Hugh Beresford’s fault. And yet the annoying part of the matter was that he could neither throw the blame of it on him, nor explain to Joanne what had made him meet her request with so much ungraciousness.

He felt absurdly disturbed and vexed as he followed her out into the garden. A man like Jack Dallas, if he had committed

the same sort of blunder that Godfrey had done, would have laughed it off, and set the matter right again in a minute; but Godfrey was not like Jack; he had none of his friend's pleasant self-assurance or ready mental agility, and the thing he had done annoyed him very much. He could not think of another word to say to Joanne; and, as for her, she troubled herself to take no further notice of him whatever; and then in little more than a few seconds his opportunity was lost, for other people were speaking to her, and other people also had addressed him—the pretty Clara and her mother both coming up to him together, and claiming his attention for themselves.

He was not with Joanne again after this. For half an hour he saw her playing on the lawn; then, at a moment when his back was turned, she and Lilian must have taken

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their departure. A little later on he set himself to seek for her, though with only a very vague conception of what he should attempt to say to her should they meet; but he found soon that they were both gone.

“What—did you not say good-bye to them?” Jack asked him in his light way. “Oh, I did. I walked with them to the gate. They want us to go up to-morrow.”

“Yes, I know,” said Godfrey shortly.

The two young men got back to their inn at eight o'clock. The afternoon's entertainment had amused Mr. Dallas, but Godfrey was rather savage, and could not be got to say much about it. He listened to his friend's talk very unsympathetically; he was not in a mood to feel any interest in the Arthur Beresfords.

He found himself instead thinking per-

sistently of Joanne, and planning how he could efface the bad impression he had made upon her. He began, before long, to get impatient for the next day to come. Possibly, he thought, when he went up the next evening he should find that she had already forgotten his offence, and should that be so it might be best to leave well alone, and hold his peace; but if—as he strongly suspected would be the case—she should *not* have forgotten it, then he must be prepared with something to say to her, he told himself; and accordingly he set about his preparation, and pursued it with a devotion that seemed worthy of a more important cause.

He was very eager next morning for the hours to pass, and for the time to arrive when they might present themselves at the Vicarage. As the day went on and the

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evening drew near his spirits rose. Last night he had been intensely annoyed with himself at what he had done ; but now, to a large extent, his annoyance had given way to a far more agreeable feeling of expectation. He had had a misunderstanding with Joanne, and now his business was to clear this misunderstanding up ; and as he opened the gate of the Vicarage garden he was conscious that he was looking forward to his approaching work with very definitely pleasant anticipation.

It is one thing, however, to make one's plans, and often quite another to carry them out ; and somehow Godfrey did not find it an easy business this evening to get Joanne to himself. She greeted him indeed on his arrival, but she greeted him very briefly ; and after that, try as he would, he could not gain a minute's talk alone with

her until the evening was nearly coming to an end. "She is avoiding me intentionally," he said to himself, and the thought that she was doing this roused him and made him impatient; but it also unquestionably flattered him a little too. If she had shown unconsciousness of any cause of coolness between them it would not have flattered him half so much.

At last, however, when the sun had set, made bold, perhaps, by the fading light, he arrested her determinedly, and made her give her ear to him. She was walking on the lawn with some of the others, and he came to her side, and said something to her that only she could hear.

"I have been wanting all the evening to speak to you," he said. "Do stay with me for a minute. There—just let them pass on." He paused for a few moments till

their companions had got to a convenient distance, then—"You *must* know how angry I have been with myself for having vexed you yesterday," he exclaimed with warmth.

She had stood still, but her face, it seemed to him, had not its usual look as she answered quietly—

"I am sorry you thought that I was vexed."

"I made you misunderstand me," he exclaimed quickly.

She gave a little cough. "I don't think I misunderstood you," she replied. And then suddenly she raised her straight-forward eyes to his face. "I asked you to do something that it was a mistake to have asked; and you let me feel that it was a mistake: that was all," she said.

"But it was no mistake," he answered eagerly. "How could you have thought it

one for a moment ? As for hesitating to do such a trifle—why, I only wish there was anything in the world I could do—to make you believe—”

“It was no matter,” she interrupted him quickly. And then she hesitated. “You make far too much of a little thing.”

“But you have been vexed with me all this evening, you know,” he said.

This accusation took her aback, and she blushed.

“I am sorry if I have seemed vexed,” she answered gently. “I ought not to have minded. It was only—” And then she stopped.

“It was only—what ?”

“I mean I was annoyed, of course,” she said with a little reluctance, “at having said something which your manner, when I said it, seemed to me to show that you

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thought I ought to have left alone. Naturally one does not like to make mistakes of that kind."

"But I tell you again, you made no mistake. I wish I could explain it to you," said Godfrey earnestly.

"Then—why don't you?"

And, as she asked this, Joanne looked so straight in his face that Mr. Helstone was afraid he blushed.

But yet, if the question embarrassed him, on the whole he was pretty well content. He had got what he had been aiming at: he had secured Joanne's companionship; and though she might put inquiries to him that were difficult to be answered, still there was a certain pleasure in being confronted by these inquiries, and in finding himself driven either to face or to evade them.

"Then why don't you explain it?" she

asked quickly, and he experienced this unpleasant sensation of blushing, and then he almost laughed.

“Are there not hosts of things that won’t bear explanation?” he said. “The smallest things sometimes would need the most words to make them clear—far more words than they were worth—and this was a thing of that kind. It was nothing—absolutely nothing; and yet, without an absurd amount of explanation, I couldn’t make you understand it.”

“And that is all you mean to tell me?” she said.

“Yes,” he answered; “that is all I mean to tell you.”

And then there was a little pause.

“I think we had better go in,” she suddenly said.

“Oh, dear me, no!” he exclaimed;

"don't let us do that. Why, I haven't spoken ten words to you yet. And—and you haven't told me that you believe what I have been saying? I mean, that you will take my word for it, and believe that you misunderstood me?"

"Of course, if you say that I misunderstood you, I—believe it," she said.

"And we are not going to be worse friends than we were before?"

"I hope not," she answered. "I should be sorry if such a little thing were to make any difference," she added next moment.

"Were you very angry with me?" he asked, curiously pleased that she did not at once let the subject drop.

"I was angriest with myself," she said.

"Yes; but if you took my answer to imply a rebuke you must have hated me. A rebuke! What *could* you have thought

of me ! Do you know," he said, "I felt so overwhelmed when you got up in that silent way and went out of the room, that you could hardly have upset me more if you had boxed my ears."

"But it was quite natural in me to go away," she said.

"Yes ; I am afraid I had made it natural. That was the pleasant reflection that you left me when you went, and that stayed with me all night, and has been haunting me all day ; and that, if you had had your own way just now, Miss Joanne, I should have taken back again with me to my pillow presently."

"Well, but you will not need to do that now, you see," she said, and laughed, though rather quickly and shyly.

Next moment she repeated—"I think we had better come in," and he did not this

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second time venture to object. They had a little way, however, to go before they could reach the house, and he made the most of this by walking at a most leisurely and dilatory pace.

"My aunt's little party went off very well—don't you think it did?" Joanne asked. "They like these afternoon parties at Rose Cottage; they often give them. This one was given, you know, entirely in your honour."

"I feel very much flattered," said Godfrey.

"In yours and Mr. Dallas's together, I mean," Joanne explained. "They all like Mr. Dallas."

"Oh, Jack makes himself popular everywhere," said Godfrey.

"I suppose he does. I wonder if it is a good thing?" said Joanne abruptly.

"To make oneself popular? It is a very pleasant thing, at any rate."

"Yes, it is very pleasant." But Joanne spoke a little dubiously. "And I like Mr. Dallas too," she added quickly. "Nobody could help liking him, I think. I only wonder sometimes whether one would ever get to care *very* much for anybody who is so exactly the same, as he is, to all people."

"Well, but you needn't try to care for him so very much, need you?" asked Godfrey, not at all seeing the necessity for any proceeding of this kind. "Most of us are content with liking, and being liked, a little."

"But most of us also want a few people to like us more than a little, I suppose," Joanne answered; "and what I was wondering was whether anybody would ever like Mr. Dallas so."

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“He has got a mother and a sister,” said Godfrey. “His sister is younger than he is—a nice bright kind of girl; but, it is true, I never heard him speak very much about her; and as for his friends—well, I don’t know that he has any friends with whom he is more intimate than he is with me. He makes his way capitably everywhere; that is about it, I fancy.”

“And so, in other words,” said Joanne, “you mean that you agree with me?”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Godfrey; “but, on the whole—why, yes, I suppose I do.”

“There is the supper bell,” said Joanne next moment; but Godfrey merely answered, “Oh, but they will ring another;” and instead of hastening his steps, on the contrary stood still, and, leisurely turning round, began to survey the heavens.

"What a delightful evening it is! Do you know much about the stars?" he said.

"No—nothing," replied Joanne with decision.

"There is Jupiter," he said.

"So I see," she replied; "but he will be much better worth looking at by the time you go home."

"Perhaps not; the clouds may have risen by that time," answered Godfrey. "Just wait one moment. I think it is delightful to watch them coming out in the twilight. Let me see—is that Sirius?"

"I really don't know," said Joanne.

"I think it must be. And you see the old Bear, of course?"

"Oh yes—I see the Bear," said Joanne.

"And—the Pole star now. Let us look out for it."

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But just as Godfrey had thrown his head back, and begun to gaze up to the zenith, the second bell rang, and with a laugh Joanne left him, and went in at the open door.

"I don't know if you can get Mr. Helstone to think of supper; he is star-struck in the garden," she said to her father, meeting him as she entered the hall; and then the Vicar went forward to find his guest.

"Come along—come along, Mr. Helstone! The stars will wait for *you*, sir, but supper waits for no man," he cried, and he laid hold of Godfrey, who, to tell the truth, was showing no further eagerness to pursue his astronomical researches, and grasping him by the shoulder brought him straightway indoors.

It had been a pleasant half-hour, and

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Godfrey was quite aware that he had found it so as he entered the house; and, moreover, the evening after this remained pleasant to him to the end, for he managed to get himself a seat at the supper-table by Joanne's side, and Joanne's manner to him while the meal lasted had never been franker or more friendly. Indeed he almost told himself that it had never before been equally friendly; and, for his own part, he distinctly felt that their little quarrel and reconciliation had placed him in a closer relation to her, and given birth to an intimacy that they had not hitherto reached.

In idle times the smallest trifles often suffice to interest us. It was a comparatively unimportant matter yet to Godfrey that Joanne Beresford should smile upon him, but still as he sat beside her to-night

he was quite aware that he sought for her smiles, and he knew presently that he went home satisfied because she had given them to him.

"It seems to me," said Jack, as they walked back to their inn, "that you're getting uncommonly sweet on Miss Joanne;" and then at this charge Godfrey laughed—not like a man who disliked the accusation.

"I am not as sweet upon her as you are upon—pretty well every woman you meet," he retorted, however.

"Oh, come!" cried Jack, with alarmed modesty. "That's too much! Every woman I meet! Upon my word, I should have my hands full."

"Well, they are full, I should say," replied Godfrey. "I am sure amongst all these girls here you are having an active time of it."

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"It is certainly an amazingly nice place for girls," Jack assented with appreciation. "Quite wonderful, considering that they are all of one clan. I'm beginning to like that little girl Edith better, by the way."

"Oh, Edith is very well," said Godfrey.

"Yes—she is rather a bright little person. You see, you engrossed Miss Joanne so to-night that I was obliged to take up with her sister."

"*I* engrossed her!" exclaimed Godfrey. "That is a pretty charge, when I never even spoke to her till nine o'clock!"

"Well, if *you* didn't speak to her, no one else did. *I* couldn't get her attention at all, I know," said Jack lightly. "I thought something was the matter with her, she was so quiet."

And then, though Godfrey made no

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answer, he felt something suddenly go through him that was singularly like a little thrill of triumph.

“She was content enough to talk to *me*,” he thought.





CHAPTER VIII.

“Look here, Helstone! Who’s that?” said Mr. Dallas one morning, and Godfrey joined his friend at the inn window, and looked with him into the village street, where there were several people passing, and amongst them, Mrs. Arthur Beresford, with a young man at her side.

Godfrey gave a glance at him, and felt an impulse of dislike.

“I suppose it is her son,” he said shortly. “You heard he was coming, didn’t you? He’s a poor-looking fellow.”

“Poor-looking!” echoed Jack. “Poor is no word for him. I don’t believe it’s possible that can be young Beresford.”

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But before the day had ended, Mr. Dallas found that it *was* young Beresford, for he and Godfrey met him with some of the Beresford girls in the afternoon, and they introduced him to them as their brother, who had just come down from London.

He was an undersized, ill-made, sickly-looking young man. The girls, who were blooming and full of spirits, stood talking to Jack and Godfrey, and their brother in silence traced patterns with his walking-stick upon the ground. Jack good-naturedly addressed a sentence or two to him, but he made only the briefest responses. He had a cadaverous face, only redeemed from extreme plainness by a pair of dark and rather noticeable eyes, which, however, as if he were ashamed of them, he kept resolutely drooped.

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“A very odd sort of person. Is he half-witted, do you think?” Jack asked, when he and Godfrey had passed on; but Godfrey shook his head.

“They say he is very clever,” he answered. “One wouldn’t think it, certainly. He has a terribly hang-dog look.”

“It’s odd how one in a family sometimes will be like that!” said Jack reflectively. “The sisters here are such good-looking girls, and the mother must have had no small pretensions in her day. It must be something of a humiliation to a woman of her kind, I should think, to have such an ugly duckling as this amongst her brood.”

“And he has had the presumption to make love to Joanne!” thought Godfrey indignantly to himself. But he did not utter this remark aloud.

Godfrey had really tried since that little

episode of his with Joanne to feel charitably towards Hugh Beresford, and to prepare himself to make his acquaintance with at least a moderate amount of friendliness ; but the sight of the young man had precipitately quenched their kindly feeling, and involuntarily inspired him in its stead with one that was little short of aversion. For that any one so mean in look, so infelicitous in manner, so wanting in, at any rate, all outward manliness, should have had the presumption to raise his eyes to Joanne Beresford, appeared to him to argue a nature so embued with conceit, that any alliance with it, or even any tolerance of it, would be impossible.

“ We shall find him, I dare say, as vain as a peacock,” he said aloud. “ It’s odd, but these half-developed people generally are. I suppose nature gives them self-satisfaction

from a sort of freak of kindness. It must make them much more agreeable to themselves, no doubt,—though certainly it makes them a vast deal more offensive to their fellows.”

Godfrey was starting with Mr. Dallas for an afternoon's fishing with the Vicar, who had promised to meet them at his favourite point of the river. There was no pleasanter man to fish with than Mr. Beresford, and the two friends had soon come to be of this mind, and to welcome him cordially whenever they could get him to join them. He came striding towards them over the grass to-day before they had been five minutes at their trysting-place, with Wasp at his heels, and his fishing-tackle on his shoulder, and his frank, handsome face as full of sunshine as a summer day.

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“Got ahead of me! Got ahead of me, lads!” he called out briskly as he came near. “Ah, I thought I should have had you this time; and so I should, only an old soul stopped me at the gate. An awful old tramp, I’m afraid; but she got a shilling out of me,—though I made her listen to a sermon for it,” said the Vicar, shaking his head over his own weakness. “Well, well; it’s hard to know what to do with them! You two are young men beginning life, and if you will take my advice, you will never give to tramps. *I* made a resolution once that I wouldn’t, many years ago: I and my wife made it together—and it has been a considerable satisfaction to me ever since that my wife at any rate has held to it.” And then the Vicar gave a half-laugh, and a half-sigh, and, disencumbering himself of his traps, began to give himself to his work.

Jack said to him presently, "We have just seen your nephew. We met him with his sisters, as we came along."

"What—Hugh?" asked the Vicar. "He has arrived then—has he?—poor lad!"

"They said he came yesterday," said Godfrey. "He doesn't look very strong, I am afraid."

"Strong!" echoed Mr. Beresford with emphasis. "He's as weak as a cat. Never knew such a fellow! But he's a clever little chap for all that," he added. "You wouldn't think it, to look at him, but he has got a head of his own, and an uncommon deal of information in it too, as well as of mother wit. Oh no, Hugh is not a lad to be disposed of with a flick of your thumb."

"We must get acquainted with him," said Jack courteously. "He didn't say

much just now, but we must have him some day by himself."

"Oh, you will get on with him," said the Vicar. "You will like him. Of course, it is a terrible pity that he doesn't look more like a man—that will always tell against him, for people can't free their minds from prejudice in such matters; but he has so much talent—real, good, solid stuff—that I have a strong feeling he'll make his way in the end. I think he will—I hope he will," said the Vicar cheerily.

"Make his way, and—win his cousin, I wonder?" thought Godfrey to himself, and all at once he flung out his line with a vehemence that made Mr. Beresford look round surprised.

"Hallo!" he said.

But Godfrey recovered himself in a

moment, and gave a laugh. "I was only beating the water," he explained.

The young men went up to the Vicarage that evening, and they found Hugh Beresford there when they arrived. He had come up with a couple of his sisters, and the girls were playing croquet, but Hugh was standing on one of the gravel-walks with his uncle, a small insignificant figure that contrasted rather pitifully with the Vicar's grand proportions, his breadth of shoulder and length of limb.

He seemed to be talking with some animation before Godfrey and Jack came, but as soon as they approached he shrank into his shell; and presently, withdrawing himself from them, Godfrey had the doubtful satisfaction of seeing him join his cousin Joanne, and carry her away with him to a more distant part of the garden. They

disappeared down one of the side-walks, and, to tell the truth, the sight made Godfrey grow hot.

He went to Lilian, who had just finished one game of croquet, and offered himself as her partner for the next, and they played for half an hour. By the end of that time Joanne and her companion had returned from their stroll, and Jack had joined them; and Godfrey, feeling that it behoved him to get on better terms with the man, sooner or later, if he meant to stand well with Joanne Beresford, joined them too.

Joanne and Jack were talking together as he came up, and, as she glanced towards Godfrey at his approach, she gave him a sudden smile that he was conscious did a good deal to smooth his rather ruffled mood. With almost a good grace a moment

or two after his arrival he made some slight remark to Hugh.

“You must find this a pleasant change from London?” he said to him.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Hugh, shifting his weight uneasily from one leg to the other; and Joanne laughed and shook her head.

“No, no; he never finds any place a pleasant change from London,” she struck in. “He would live in London, if he could, from the 1st of January to the 31st of December.”

“Dear me!” said Godfrey. He gave a quick glance at this passionate lover of urban life. “Well, no doubt it is a place that gets a great hold on one,” he said; “but I doubt if I should ever become attached to it to that extent. I suppose you have lived in London a long time?”

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“ Oh yes, pretty long. At least—oh no, not very long. About four years,” answered Hugh confusedly, with his eyes on the ground.

“ That is a good while,” said Godfrey.

But Hugh at this only wheeled round, and without making any reply began to survey the prospect, as if to put a stop to further questioning.

“ A charming manner !” thought Godfrey to himself. “ Surely it is not possible that she can care for him.” And he looked at Joanne again, and unexpectedly met her eyes fixed upon his own, with something in their expression that, whether rightly or not, he read to be of the nature of an appeal.

It was a quick look, quickly withdrawn ; but it made Godfrey do what—had she not given it to him—he would not have done :

it made him, after only a moment's hesitation, address himself to Hugh again.

"I have a friend in London in your profession. I wonder if you know him—Mr. Coulsen?" he said.

Hugh withdrew his eyes from the landscape, and for the first time a smile that was both a quick and a pleasant one came to his sallow face.

"I know Mr. Coulsen very well indeed. He has been very kind to me," he said.

"Tell me something about him," replied Godfrey. "I have heard nothing of him for a long time." And he set himself at Hugh's side, and carried the young man off with him, leaving Joanne behind talking to Jack. It was rather an act of heroism, he thought; "but if she asks me to do anything for her again, by Jove, she sha'n't have an excuse a second time for thinking I am unwilling to

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do it," he said to himself; and so, in a fervent spirit of self-sacrifice, he marched Hugh Beresford up and down the garden walks,—and met with the reward that perhaps his devotion merited.

For when he had fairly launched his companion on a subject that interested him he found that in truth Hugh was not hard to converse with. He had a good deal to say about Mr. Coulsen, and after his first awkwardness and hesitation had been overcome he said it easily enough. Then Godfrey asked him about his own work, and they talked for a time of that; and finally fell upon other subjects of more general interest; and Godfrey was fain to confess that, mean and insignificant as was his outward man, his companion soon showed that he had stuff in him of perhaps more than an ordinary kind. For nearly an hour they strolled

about the garden, while gradually Hugh emerged more and more from his shell, till Godfrey found at last that it no longer needed any effort on his part to draw him out.

Yet it seemed as if he had the power of conversing only with a single person, for when at last they rejoined some of the others on the lawn he relapsed again almost instantly into shy and self-conscious silence. They all talked round him, but he took no part in their talk ; his lips had closed as the first sound of their voices fell on his ear, and, as far as Godfrey was aware, they opened no more.

It was a fine evening, and they lingered in the garden for a long time. Once, before they went indoors, Joanne took an opportunity to say suddenly, half-aside, to Godfrey—

"I think you have been very kind to-night."

"Why? Do you mean merely because I have talked to your cousin?" he replied after a moment's hesitation (for he might have pretended that he did not understand her, but somehow with Joanne such pretences seemed always out of place). "I have found him very interesting," he said.

"Yes, he is interesting when you get to know him. When you once get him to talk it is all right," she returned; "but you understand now what—what I meant the other day,—and I should like to say that I am very grateful to you," said Joanne hesitating, and with a little shyness in her voice.

"I wish you had a greater thing to be grateful to me for," he replied. "Or rather," he added quickly, "I wish I could

show *my* gratitude by doing something greater for you. I wonder if there is anything I shall *ever* be able to do?" And then he looked in her face, and something that he thought he saw there encouraged him to add, "I would give more than a little if there might be."

"You will do a great deal for me," she answered quickly, "if you will continue to be kind to Hugh."

This was not exactly the response that Godfrey had desired, and he winced a little as Joanne made it. However, after his eager profession, he could not perceive that he had any way of escape, so—

"I shall always be glad to have a talk with your cousin," he said, "but as for being kind, I am afraid the kindness of talking to him is a very small one."

"Oh, but indeed it is not," she answered

earnestly. "You see now what he is ; you see the injustice he does himself. You could not do a kinder thing than let him be with you sometimes. If you really would care at all to do anything to give me pleasure," Joanne said, rather timidly, "you could not please me more, nor make me more grateful, than by doing that."

"Then you may be very certain that I will do it," Godfrey said.

But he had not liked this last speech of Joanne's at all ; he had liked it so little that he could not restrain himself from adding, after a moment's silence—

"Hugh Beresford is very fortunate to have such a warm friend in you."

"Hugh and I have been friends all our lives," she answered quickly, "and when I see him neglected it gives me pain."

"But he would never be neglected if he

could only—well, if he could but throw himself a little more into things,” said Godfrey, rather doubtful how to choose his words.

“Yes; but you see that is exactly what he seems to have no power to do.”

“Well, it is unfortunate, certainly,” replied Godfrey. “It will be a great drawback to him, I am afraid, as far as ordinary intercourse with the world goes. Not perhaps, however, that that matters much,” he added, “for he seems to me such a clever fellow, that in his profession I should think he would be sure to get on.”

“I am so glad to hear you say that,” exclaimed Joanne warmly.

And then Godfrey winced again. It was, as he knew, no concern of his, and yet it disturbed him to perceive these signs of excessive interest. The man was very

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well in his way, but considered in the character of Joanne's lover, to tell the truth, Godfrey found that he could not think of him with equanimity. He felt angry with Joanne because she seemed so fond of him. That she should regard him with pity, and a certain amount of kindness, and even, as far as his talents were concerned, of admiration, he would have found natural and pardonable, but to feel *affection* for him! The evidences that she gave of doing that were what discomposed Godfrey, and acted on the moment as a spur to incite him half-unconsciously to put himself in the lists against Mr. Hugh, and try his strength with him.

He had got Joanne to himself, and he managed to keep her as his companion for half-an-hour. He got her to accompany him to the gate that opened into the

meadow, and having brought her to this point, there he detained her. There was a pretty sky to look at as an excuse for making this gate their resting-place—an amber sky, with the delicate outline of the distant trees against it.

He thought that they had talked enough about Hugh Beresford, so, as they stood together in this quiet place, he turned their discourse to other things, and by degrees to those two topics specially that are always of supreme interest to every young man and woman who have begun to think with anything like sentiment of one another—to himself and her.

“I shall always think of these weeks as amongst the happiest I ever spent in my life,” he began to say, as soon as they had slightly discussed the chief features of the scene before them; and then, having

made this hopeful beginning, he propped his back against the gate, setting himself so that he could see her face, and prepared himself to get all the enjoyment that was practicable out of his position.

She said, after a moment's silence :

"I think we shall *all* remember these weeks with pleasure. We have so few visitors usually, you know. Indeed"—and then she hesitated slightly—"I don't know that anything quite like your coming has ever happened before, and so it has had a pleasant flavour of novelty."

"Well, novelty no doubt has its attractions," replied Godfrey, not quite content with this remark ; "but I am afraid, as far as we are concerned—Jack and I—or at least I speak for myself—I should like better to think that we affected you now with a sense of familiarity."

"Oh, yes, *now*—that is another thing; of course the novelty has pretty well worn off," replied Joanne. "I was only speaking of the charm you had at first."

"And which has quite departed, I suppose?" he said.

"I am afraid it has," she replied demurely.

"Are you a very fickle person, Miss Joanne?" he asked after a moment with a laugh.

"Yes, very," she answered. "Women always are, you know."

"Women being all, of course, made after one pattern?"

"The poets say so," said Joanne.

"And you, of course, believe them implicitly?" asked Godfrey. And then he laughed again and looked at her. "I don't believe you are fickle," he said. "Fickle women ought to be fair, with blue eyes."

That is the orthodox type. 'Fair and false.'"

"I had golden hair once," said Joanne—"when I was a child."

"Oh, but that doesn't count," he exclaimed. "Golden hair, had you? I should like to have seen you then. Miss Joanne, if the question is not very rude, may I ask (I have often wondered) how old you are?"

"I am nearly twenty; at least I shall be twenty in October," she said.

"Then you are more than four years younger than I am. I was twenty-four last month."

"That is a grave age," she said.

"Very. When you reach it you will feel yourself extremely old. But you won't reach it yet for a long while. I wonder what will have happened to

you by the time you are four-and-twenty!"

She shook her head.

"Perhaps very little," she said.

"Yes; perhaps very little, but more likely a good deal."

"Not many things happen here, you know. It will be different for you. In four years' time you will be—changed, I should think."

"For the better, do you mean, or for the worse?"

"Well—for both, I dare say." There was a little mischief in her tone as she said this. "In some ways you may be better—perhaps."

"And in others you suspect there will be a sad backsliding? I think at these four years' end, if you talk in this way, I shall have to come back and show myself."

"We should be very glad," she said.

"If I don't it won't be my will that is wanting. I should be sorry—I should be terribly sorry—to think when I go away presently, that I should never see this place—and all of you—again."

"England is not very large," she said, after a moment's silence. "I don't suppose, if you care to come back, that you will find it difficult."

And then there was a sudden pause while he questioned with himself whether he might venture to say anything more; but before he had made up his mind she had begun to speak of something else.

"When you go away from here what do you do next?" she asked. "Are you going home?"

"I think so," he said. "I imagine I shall be at home during the autumn."

“ With your mother ? ”

“ Yes ; with my mother.”

“ And your cousin ? ”

“ I suppose so.”

“ They will be very glad to get you back.”

“ Do you think they will ? ” he asked, laughing. “ Well, for anything you know, I may be a very ill-conditioned fellow to live with.”

“ Yes ; you may be ” (she gave her assent to this proposition quite readily), “ but mothers like their sons even when the sons don’t deserve much liking ; and so it seems to me that probably your mother will be glad to have you in any case. Are you a great deal with her when you are at home ? ”

“ We are not bad friends,” he said.

“ And—your cousin ? ”

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"Am I much with my cousin, do you mean? Oh, well, we walk together, and ride together, and—she sings to me."

"Does she sing well?"—after a moment's meditation.

"Not particularly." Godfrey gave this information with rather an odd laugh.

"Why do you answer in that way?" Joanne asked instantly.

"What do you mean by 'that way?'" he retorted. "I say she does not sing particularly well. Many people don't, you know."

"But you said that she didn't, so oddly."

"Oh, I was merely thinking of something. I believe my cousin has not much talent for music. She plays a little, but you wouldn't care about her performance much. When I go home I am afraid it will seem strange to me—after yours."

“Mine is not very good. It only *might* be good — perhaps — if I were taught.” Joanne said this with a little diffidence.

“I don’t know what it might be if you were taught, but, as it is now, I would rather hear it than any singing in the world.”

“Oh, but you ought not to say that.”

“Why ought I not to say it, if it is true?”

“Because you make me ashamed—when you speak in such an exaggerated way.”

“You may think I exaggerate, but it is the literal truth. I don’t expect ever to care for any other singing as I do for yours. I don’t know how other people would rate it—I say nothing about that; but I know that nobody else I ever heard sing has moved me as you do.”

“If you really mean that, then I am

glad," she said. But her tone sounded as if she was too shy of his praise to be made very glad yet by it.

"I am sure you believe that I mean it."

And then there was a moment's silence, which she broke abruptly.

"I should like to know something more about your cousin. Tell me something else about her," she said.

"Well—what shall I tell you?"

"Is she quite young?"

"She is twenty-two."

"And does she live with you—always?"

"She has lived with us for the last two years. I don't know what she may do always."

"Is she—dependent on you? May I ask that? Is she poor, I mean?"

"Oh no, she is rich. She is richer than

any of us. She has a large house, and a large income."

Joanne looked for a moment at him, and then sent her gaze across the meadow. There was another little pause.

"Well?" he inquired presently. "I thought you were going to ask me something else."

"Oh—yes," she said. But she rather hesitated. "Do you think I am very curious?" she said suddenly.

"Not at all," he replied. "I like your questions."

"Then you mean I may ask some more?"

"Certainly you may."

"Is your cousin very nice?"

"She is very good. She is *very* good indeed. My mother is awfully fond of her."

"And—are *you* fond of her?"

"I like her very much. She is—well, she is certainly almost the best girl I know."

"The best?"—a little hesitatingly.
"The—the most loveable, do you mean?"

"No; I mean the one with the fewest faults. The most loveable people have often plenty of faults."

"But your cousin has not?"

"No; my cousin has not. She never does wrong—nor says what she oughtn't to say—nor feels what she oughtn't to feel. She is as good as gold."

"That must be very—nice for you," said Joanne.

"Yes, it is very nice—very nice indeed," replied Godfrey.

And then there was again a little silence, till, after a minute had passed: "Well?" he said once more, hoping to incite her to

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renew her questions, but this time she only laughed and shook her head.

“I think just now I have nothing else to ask,” she said. “I am afraid I have asked too many things already.”

“The daughters of Eve are always curious, you know,” he told her boldly.

“And what,” she inquired daintily, “of the sons of Adam?”

“I can only speak for one son of Adam,” he said, “and he, I know—”

But at this point their talk was suddenly interrupted, for some one called “Joanne!” and the next moment there were steps on the gravel-walk behind them, and Joanne turned from the gate against which she had been leaning while they talked.

And then they went indoors, and Godfrey was very well content. His half-hour, he felt, had been well spent; it

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had given him present entertainment, and it had unquestionably advanced his intimacy with Joanne. "If I can get her to like me, why should I not try to do it?" he was conscious that he had begun to ask himself.

They rejoined the others, and then they all soon went to supper. The Vicarage suppers were simple repasts, but there was always a spirit of open hospitality in the house that gave a pleasant flavour to its meals, however plain they were. The mere sight of Mr. Beresford's genial face at the bottom of his table did more to give zest to the viands than an appetizing sauce.

They had a pleasant supper to-night, and a merry one, even though some amongst the guests were silent. "I will get her to sit next to me again," Godfrey thought

to himself as they entered the dining-room all together; but, though he did his best to accomplish this, he all but failed in his endeavour, and would have failed altogether if chance had not come to his aid. For Joanne, when she took her seat, let her cousin Hugh take the chair next to her, and indeed (if Godfrey's eyes did not deceive him) even mutely invited him to do so, and Godfrey, who was hovering at her elbow, would have had to content himself with a place on the opposite side of the table, if Mrs. Beresford, seeing him unprovided for, had not promptly ejected one of her own brood from the seat he coveted on Joanne's right hand.

“Victor, do you not see that Mr. Helstone has no chair? Get up, and go over there,” she said in her usual tone of command.

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"Oh—I supposed *he* was going there," replied Victor.

"Your business is to observe, and not to suppose," replied his mother curtly.

And then the boy rose up, and Godfrey took his place. But he did not take it with unmixed satisfaction, for Joanne had called Hugh to her side, but she had not called him, he could not but reflect.

However, he had sufficient good sense not to punish himself by converting this fact into a grievance, but, having got the position that he desired (though not perhaps by the means most flattering to his self-love), he proceeded without loss of time to appropriate as much of Joanne's attention as he could; and—in spite of a few obstacles that she put in his way at the beginning—he succeeded in this object sufficiently to content himself fairly well,

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for Joanne's companion on her other hand was shy enough to be easily silenced by a more resolute talker, and Godfrey showed himself tolerably resolved to talk.

He talked, and, to his satisfaction, he made Joanne listen to him. At first she tried to occupy herself more with her cousin than she did with him, but Hugh's hopeless diffidence, coupled with Godfrey's determination not to be suppressed, soon made this effort fail. She might, and did, turn often away from him, but as often as she turned he made her turn again, and her face, as she showed it to him at these recalls, did—*not* express dissatisfaction; or at least, so he told himself, not without a conscious sense of triumph.

The Vicar had got Miss Clara Beresford on his left hand, and was jesting with her, and bantering her, in a kindly avuncular

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fashion, to which Godfrey thought, as he occasionally caught fragments of their conversation, that she did not respond with much wit. She was a lively and very pretty girl—prettier than Joanne, he said to himself once, glancing at the two faces in succession,—and yet how much more charm than her cousin Joanne had !

“ You won’t sing me a song—you won’t tell me a secret ; what is there you will do for me ? ” asked the Vicar jovially, leaning back in his chair, and surveying his niece with a twinkle in his eye ; and then Miss Clara gave a pout.

“ Why need I do anything ? ” she said half aggrieved.

“ Because you ought to make yourself agreeable,” responded Mr. Beresford with decision. “ Isn’t that the duty of every

woman? It isn't enough to sit still and look pretty."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Miss Clara blushing.

"Of course you may be thankful that you *can* sit still and look pretty. I'm saying nothing against that,—but I want you to entertain me as well. I want you to tell me something that is interesting."

"Oh, uncle!" ejaculated Miss Clara helplessly again.

"Well, do you never tell people things that are interesting? Supposing now that I were five-and-twenty, and had chestnut hair, and a straight nose, and a flower in my button-hole—"

"Oh, I think you are too bad!" cried the girl blushing very red.

"My dear, if I were all that, you would find so much to say to me; you would do a hundred things to please me; and now

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you won't sing me an old song! I shall have to get one of my own girls to do it. Come, Joanne," he cried suddenly, "give us a song, and set a good example."

And then Joanne looked up, with something of reluctance in her face, but, after a moment's hesitation, did what her father bade her.

It was the second time that Godfrey had heard her sing as they sat at supper. "I do it often when we are alone," she had told him on that other occasion. "Papa likes it. I have done it ever since I was a child." But she evidently did not care to do it before strangers.

She began to sing, however, and after a few moments forgot herself, and sang the song that she had chosen with a fresh purity and sweetness that filled Godfrey—and perhaps others beside him—with delight.

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Her father sat listening to her with a smile upon his face. When the first song was ended he made her sing another.

“Give us something with a chorus, my dear,” he said, “and we’ll all join in.”

So she sang another song that had a chorus, and, softly beating time with his hand upon the table, the Vicar raised his fine tenor voice and chimed in with a will.

“You see, this is a luxury I allow myself now and then,” he explained to his guests at the end, with one of the gleams of fun that came so often over his face. “On the whole, I don’t think an occasional chorus can put the Church in much danger. It’s a compromise, one might say, between total abstinence and an entire song.”

“Then—if it would not be too much to ask—would you not give us another

compromise?" asked Jack in his ready way.

They laughed at his request, and Mr. Beresford began to shake his head; but Joanne said quickly, "Oh yes, he will give you another; he will give you one that he loves." And, looking at him with a little mischief in her eyes, she suddenly broke into the grand old Jacobite song:

"Cam ye by Athole braes, lad wi' the philabeg."

It was a thing to remember, Godfrey thought. The air and the words seemed to stir the Vicar almost as a horse is stirred by the sound of a trumpet. His eyes brightened, and his face flushed, and his voice rang out in the rapturous chorus till it filled and echoed through the room:

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"Charlie, Charlie, wha wadna follow thee?
Lang hast thou loved and trusted us fairly!
Charlie, Charlie, wha wadna follow thee?
King o' the Hieland hearts, bonnie Prince Charlie!"

When the last notes had been sung, Jack and Godfrey with one impulse gave a cheer that was joyfully taken up by the boys, and with rather a shamefaced look the Vicar began to laugh.

"I haven't sung that for years," he said, almost apologetically. "It's not the sort of thing, I'm afraid, for me now—though it fires one's old heart still"—and then he rubbed his hands. "When I was a young man I had a good deal to do once with some Scotch lads, who had all these Jacobite songs at their fingers' ends, and many a wild hour's shouting we've had over them. There wasn't one that I didn't know in those days.

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But I never sing them now — I've forgotten all about them!" cried the Vicar, and rose up hastily from his seat, as if he feared an appeal for more of them, and doubted his strength to resist it. "Come away, come away," he said. "If they have caught the sound of me in the kitchen they'll be thinking the old parson has gone mad."

He preceded them all out of the room. It was past ten, and without sitting down again Godfrey and Jack took their leave.

"I suppose we are all going one way?" Mr. Helstone said to Hugh, but Hugh replied in his nervous way that he did not know—he hardly thought his sister was ready, and so, as he did not seem to desire their company, the young men prepared to start alone.

It was a clear, brilliant night. "A

glorious night; do come and look at it," Godfrey said to Joanne. And so a little group of them all issued from the house together, and talked for ten minutes under the stars. The Vicar was one of them, and, firmly planted, with his feet well apart, with his hands in his pockets, and his face upturned, he stood and discoursed about the heavens and the myriads of worlds at which they gazed.

"And here are we like a grain of sand in the midst of it all," he ended; "like a child's toy for size; and yet—"

He paused for a moment or two, and then as they walked down to the gate together—

"'Our little systems have their day,'"

he suddenly began to repeat in his musical, rich voice :

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“ ‘Our little systems have their day,
They have their day, and cease to be,
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.’

Amen!” he said abruptly, and held out his hand, and the young men, not unmoved, took it in turn, and made their adieux almost in silence.





CHAPTER IX.

"HUGH BERESFORD is on my conscience," Jack said abruptly to his friend, a day or two after this. "I believe there is something in him, and I feel as if I ought to like him for those good people's sakes, but yet—I'm blessed if I do like him. Why on earth does the fellow have such a hang-dog look? I asked Joanne that last night, and she flamed up like a turkey-cock."

"It served you right for putting such a question to her," retorted Godfrey. "I've no doubt she flamed up. They are cousins and intimate friends, and all that sort of thing. You might have known better

than to speak of him in such a way as that."

"I hope she isn't weak enough to be thinking of throwing herself away upon him," said Jack. "I have my suspicions—but I should be sorry if they were true."

"I don't believe she has a dream of anything of the kind," replied Godfrey curtly; but, though he said this, Mr. Dallas's remark had given him a little twinge.

The young men had just met Hugh Beresford, and these remarks were the consequence of their brief encounter with him. They had come across him and his mother as they were returning from a walk, and for five minutes they had talked to Mrs. Beresford, while he stood by in silence, occupied in his usual way in tracing

figures on the ground with his walking-stick; and then they had passed on, and Jack had broken out in the words that I have written above.

It stirred Godfrey not a little to hear Joanne Beresford's name coupled with her cousin's; and yet he did not in reality believe that there was anything between them. "If there were, I should call her—what I don't believe she is," he told himself hotly, venturing to speak in a way in which he would not have spoken a week ago; for this last week had very unmistakably increased the intimacy that existed between himself and Joanne, and he said to himself plainly that if she had any thought of marrying her cousin she had no right to be on such terms as she was with him. For it had come to this, and Godfrey was well aware of it: he was quite aware that

he was becoming more attracted every day by Joanne Beresford, while she on her part treated him so as to give him some right to say, as he did, that she must be a coquette if she showed so fair a face to him while she meant to marry Hugh Beresford.

"I believe, if I ever came to think ill of you, I should think ill henceforward of every woman living," he told her one day, in a tone that brought the colour to her cheek.

She blushed, but she laughed, too, at his speech.

"I hope you may never think very ill of me," she answered him; "but if I ever gave you cause to do it, you would only make things ten times worse—a hundred times worse—by thinking ill of other women too."

"Of course I should; but that ought

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only to make you feel the more deeply how much depends—for me—upon your goodness,” he returned.

And then she made no answer, and he looked at her face that she had half turned away, and wondered if he had touched her.

It is rather a dangerous amusement when a man begins to watch a woman's face, and try to read her feelings by it. Godfrey Helstone, so far in his life, had not done much of such work; but of late he had begun to find himself amazingly tempted to do it when he was with Joanne. Hers was a kind of beauty that depended so much on expression: almost the whole charm of her face lay in its mobility and brightness, and in the quickness with which it reflected and betrayed emotion of any sort, whether of pleasure, or pain, or tenderness, or anger

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or whatever might be the feeling of the moment. A thousand other women were more beautiful, but Godfrey had by this time almost come to think that no regularly lovely face that he had ever seen possessed the fascination that he found in this piquante face of Joanne's.

It was one afternoon when by chance he was alone with her, that he had made this speech about his belief in her goodness. He and Jack, that afternoon, had gone out fishing together; but his luck had been bad, and, getting tired presently of his sport, he had left Mr. Dallas at the river, and had gone away for a ramble by himself,—a ramble, however, that terminated quickly; for, as he was tramping through a wood, five minutes after he had parted from Jack, he suddenly saw a glimmer of colour through the trees that first arrested

his steps, and then quickened them to double speed,—for the ruddy colour that he saw was like the crimson of a shawl that Joanne often wore, and when he had joyfully made his way to this spot of brightness, he found that he had also made his way to her side.

She was sitting sketching, and she looked up at his approach pleasantly enough to give him reason to think that she was not sorry to see him.

“Jack and I were fishing down there. How little I knew that you were so near us!” he exclaimed, as soon as he had got within speaking distance.

“Yes; I knew you were there, for I saw you. Look—you can see Mr. Dallas now,” she replied.

But Godfrey only gave a careless glance in the direction of his friend; he had got

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something nearer to him that he found more interesting to gaze at than Mr. Dallas.

"If you were to shout I think he would hear you," said Joanne.

"But I don't want to shout," replied Godfrey. (He laughed to himself. Shout to Jack! It was about the last thing he desired to do.) "He is quite happy," he said. "He wouldn't thank us for disturbing him."

"And were you not happy, that you came away?" she asked.

"I came away because my good angel prompted me," said Godfrey. "I perceive that now, though at the time I didn't know it."

"It must have been one of the angels that guard over fish," she said—"if fish *have* guardian angels, poor things. They must have been feeling very doubtful about

it, since you and Mr. Dallas have been here."

"Oh, Jack and I are very harmless people," he exclaimed. "They must fear your father a vast deal more than they fear us. May I see what you are doing?" And then he looked over her shoulder, and she gave a little sigh.

"I am not doing much. I never do much. I wish you knew enough about painting to tell me some things."

"I wish I did," he answered fervently. "But this seems very good to me. It is slight, of course, but it is very suggestive."

"You are very good to say so," she replied dubiously.

"I am not good in the least. I really think in its way it is capital. Now a little sketch like this," exclaimed Godfrey, with an air of decision, "is a thing that would

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give me far more pleasure than I should get out of many a finished picture."

"Yes; but then, if that is so," replied Joanne cautiously, "I am afraid it only proves that your taste is in fault, not that my poor little drawing is worth anything. Still, you know, I am grateful to you," said the girl quickly; "and if you find anything to like in what I do, I am glad too."

"I'll tell you what I like in your drawings," replied Godfrey frankly. "I dare say they have faults enough—of course that must be so; but the feeling in any of them that I have seen seems to me always true. They are poetical, and as I said just now, they are suggestive. I like this one amazingly. That bit of distance especially is delightful. Now, pray go on with it. You don't mind my being here? I won't watch you, if that would put you out. Look, I

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will just lie on the grass, where I sha'n't be in your way a bit." And, suiting the action to the word, Mr. Helstone deposited himself at her feet, and dexterously arranged his position so that it allowed him to have an excellent view of her face, if not of her drawing block.

She said nothing; perhaps she had no desire to send him away. She took up her brush again, and tried to continue her work; and then they began to talk, and they talked for a long time, and it was presently, in the course of their conversation, that he made that remark about thinking ill of all other women if he should ever come to think ill of her.

He was leaning on his elbow and looking into her face as he said this to her. I do not think that her painting had progressed much during the hour that they had been

together ; she was probably not artist enough to be able at the same time to talk and work ; her brush was in her hand, but she sat looking at her sketch almost without touching it.

He had made that speech, telling her that if he lost faith in other women the blame of his disbelief would lie upon her shoulders ; and then he looked at her, to try if he could read by any sign in her face that his words had touched her ; and it seemed to him—not without satisfaction—that she did give some such sign, for there was a little quiver about her lips as she tried to smile.

“ You should not lay burdens upon people unless you know that they are willing to bear them,” she answered, after a moment’s silence.

“ But I don’t consider that it is I who am laying this burden on you. It is not I, but

circumstances," he declared. "I have come to know and to believe in you,—and after that I can't help the rest. You see, Miss Joanne, women can't shake off their responsibilities, and one bad woman has a quite immeasurable power of doing evil, and one noble woman an equally immeasurable power of doing good."

"Yes; but that is equally true of men," she answered. "I would not say—as you do about me—that if any one man I trusted turned out ill, I should doubt all other men; I don't think I would say that if the one who failed me were my own father, (if it were possible to conceive of such a thing!) but I think—" and then it seemed to him that for a moment her voice trembled a little—"I think all our lives must be influenced by the good men we know—in every direction—more than we can ever tell; by

the good men, and I suppose by the bad men too,—when we are unhappy enough to be brought near to those that are bad.”

“ Ah, but it is not the same sort of thing, quite,” persisted Godfrey. “ You see, to start with, you don’t *need* to be influenced so much. The best of you are so nearly everything you ought to be that, upon my word, I don’t know how any man could make you better ; but I doubt if there is a man living who might not be made better by a woman,—and who also could not be made worse by one too. In fact, it seems to me, Miss Joanne, that, like Balaam, you have had the power of blessing or cursing given into your hands ; and so, as I said, there is a tremendous responsibility resting on you.”

She put a few touches to her drawing, and then she said abruptly and rather

nervously, "I hope *you* never knew a woman who was really bad?"

"I am thankful to say I never did," he replied frankly; "never, at least, to my knowledge. No; I have known many ordinary women who have never affected me for good or evil; and a few whom—I would rather pass on the other side of the way; and far more than a few whom I never remember without pleasure; and one or two—two or three, I think," he said deliberately, after a moment's pause, "for whom I gratefully thank God."

There was a little silence, and then Joanne asked:

"And is one of those your mother?"

"Yes; assuredly one of those is my mother," he answered. "No better mother than mine need a man desire to have. I wish you knew her."

"I am afraid I am not likely to do that," Joanne said. "But I should like it, of course," she added courteously. "When one is much with people I think one is always interested in their belongings."

"It is strange to think that you know so little of my belongings when I know so much of yours," he said. "When I am away I shall be able to picture so well how your life goes on here; but if you are ever good enough to give a thought to me I shall be only to you like an isolated figure without background or surroundings."

"Oh no—that is not so," she answered quickly. "You know you have told me a good deal about yourself."

"Have I?" he replied dubiously. "Not much, I think."

"But indeed you have—about yourself, and your cousin, and the kind of country

you live in, and your house. I have a very distinct impression of your house, with its terrace outside the drawing-room windows ; and that library—where you say you will work.”

“Where I *say* I will work !” he echoed. “Apparently then, Miss Joanne, you don’t much believe that I intend to do it ?”

“Oh yes ; I dare say you will do it,” she said with a laugh. “At any rate, no doubt you will sit there and read ; and sometimes, I suppose, your mother will come and have pleasant talks with you ? and sometimes—your cousin, perhaps ?”

“Yes ; very probably,” said Godfrey. “Margaret will come, I dare say, and get me to help her with her Latin.”

“Does she learn Latin ?” asked Joanne quickly.

“Well, yes—she has taken to it lately.

She wanted an occupation, and she is not artistic nor musical."

"And you will give her lessons there?"

"Oh no; not regular lessons. But she will most likely come to me when she finds herself in a difficulty."

"That will be a great help to her," said Joanne demurely.

There was another little silence, and the girl, for a minute, resumed her work. Then Godfrey, lying on the grass, ejaculated: "I think this wood, on such a day as this, is like a bit of Paradise! Just look up to the sky above those trees. Look at the leaves against the blue. Is not that divine? Ah, but you can't see it as I do—you haven't got your face the right way."

"No; but I have often seen it. I know

how it looks," she said. "I am glad you are getting fond of our woods."

"I am getting so fond of them that I think they will haunt me when I go away," he answered with a half-laugh. "I shall dream of these days. I shall dream of this afternoon, and of you sitting here with your scarlet shawl—"

"Crimson!" she said.

"Well, crimson—if that is the proper word. I am so glad you had it on to-day, or I might have passed and never seen you. The pleasantest things in life, it seems to me, come oftenest when one expects them least."

"Will you please look at your watch, and tell me what time it is?" she said abruptly.

"My watch has been gaining of late," he answered with a laugh. "I don't know what time it is—I don't indeed."

"But you would know if you looked," she said gravely. "I want you to look."

And then, unwillingly, he took his watch out.

"It is quite early," he said. "It is only a little past five."

"It is time for me to go," she replied.

But yet she did not go for a few minutes more. He began to criticize her drawing again, and detained her in that way first; and then he had so many things to say about the colour of the trees, and the harmonies of tone that he professed to perceive in the scene before them, that another quarter of an hour passed, and found them at the end of it still together. But at last she would stay no longer, so he took her drawing materials out of her hands, and carried them home for her.

Almost at the gate of the Vicarage Mr. Beresford overtook them, and called out a greeting to Godfrey.

"Come in, come in, young man," he said. "The other one will soon guess where you are, and follow suit. What do you say? Return in an hour? No, why should you return in an hour when you're here already? You have had your dinner, haven't you?"

"Oh yes," said Godfrey, "I have had my dinner." For, in consideration of the suppers at which they so often assisted at the Vicarage, Mr. Dallas and he during the last eight or ten days had taken to the practice of dining early.

"Then in with you," exclaimed Mr. Beresford; and they all went to the house together.

Godfrey had tea with them, and then Jack came; and later in the evening Hugh

came too, and towards sunset the boys began to try their skill at leaping and jumping, and presently Jack and Godfrey joined them, and for the better part of an hour occupied themselves in leaping and jumping too, while the rest looked on. Godfrey and Jack were both good at this sort of sport. Jack's was the better figure of the two, but Godfrey was the taller and stronger man.

"He beats me at most things," Mr. Dallas said to the Vicar, "but I can out-run him. That is the one thing I can do." And, indeed, he ran a race with his friend presently, and easily came out the victor. But Godfrey had the best of it in almost everything else.

"Come along, lad, and take your turn with them!" the Vicar called to Hugh when all the others—boys and young men alike—were vieing with one another; but

Hugh at this address shrank nervously back.

“No, no, I can’t do any of these things,” he said, retreating hastily.

“Then make a beginning, man; the sooner you make it the better,” cried his uncle, and would have pulled him forward if Hugh had permitted it. But, flushing to the eyes, he made his escape, and the Vicar burst into a laugh that was very audibly touched with scorn.

“Tut, tut, you’re no better than a girl!” he said impatiently, and turned on his heel, leaving the blood in more faces than poor Hugh’s.

Godfrey came to Joanne when their games were over—to receive his meed of praise perhaps, though he might hardly have acknowledged to himself that he had this object.

"It has been very civil of you to look on at us all this time," he said cheerily to her.

"It has been very entertaining to look on at you," she answered. "You have been doing very pretty things."

"They might have been pretty if they had been better done; but one so soon gets out of practice," he said. And then he added civilly, "I wish we could have got your cousin to join us."

At this Joanne gave a half-annoyed sigh.

"I wish you could," she said. "But it is no use; he is too self-conscious. He will take part in nothing. He has no nerve, and no self-confidence."

She had never spoken to Godfrey before in such a tone of vexation, and it seemed to escape her now almost before she was aware.

"Oh, he will be different in time. We all change so fast," Godfrey said consolingly.

"He will never be like other people," she replied. "I thought that when he came home just now it would be so pleasant for him to have you and Mr. Dallas here,—but he takes no advantage of anything. He makes me so sorry," said the girl quickly, and turned away with more emotion in her voice than Godfrey quite liked to hear.

"I wish the fellow were back in London!" he thought with sudden impatience to himself.

There had been clouds gathering for an hour or two, and they broke at sunset, and everybody was driven indoors. In the twilight presently Joanne went to the piano and sang. Some of the young ones by that time had gone to bed, a few of

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the others had dispersed, and Godfrey took possession of an arm-chair near her, and listened in luxurious ease. After a little while a pleasant fancy took possession of him that she was singing for him alone. The room grew dark, and the other occupants of it were gathered at its farther end, and only he sat near to her, and between her songs it was to him only that she spoke.

There was a little general talk when the music ended, and then they went to supper, and after supper home. The rain had ceased by this time, and a full-faced moon, with a halo round her, was shining fitfully through breaks in the clouds.

The Vicar shook his head as he stood with his guests under the porch.

"We are going to have a change in our fine weather, I fear," he said. "I'm mis-

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taken if we shall not awake to a wet morning to-morrow. But the rain is wanted for the crops."

"And our holidays have almost come to an end!" Joanne suddenly said.

Godfrey was standing near her.

"Have they?" he asked quickly, in a tone of regret. "Are all our holidays ending? I have been putting off the thought of it; but I have been here four weeks to-day."

They left her presently, standing in the little semicircle of light that streamed from the open door, and the Vicar walked down with them to the garden gate. Godfrey looked back once, and saw her still there. She had scarcely spoken again after she had said that her holidays were almost ended. Something in these words and in the tone in which she had uttered

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them came back to him when he had turned away, bringing a vague regret that he had not made some better answer to them,—that, though he was so conscious of all the happiness he had enjoyed during these weeks that were gone, he had said nothing to tell her so. “But it does not matter; I will tell her to-morrow,” he said to himself. And then he put the thought of her aside, and gave his attention to the Vicar, who was holding forth about the coming rain, as he strode along the garden path, crunching the wet gravel beneath his feet.

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